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IN MINERS' MIRAGE-LAND

To the courtesy of the editors of the Los Angeles "Times" and the San Francisco "Chronicle"—in which publications many of these sketches have already seen print—is due their reappearance in more permanent form.

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MIRAGE IN THE DESERT

FROM THE PAINTING BY FRANK P. SAUERWEN

In Miners' Mirage-Land

by

Idah Meacham Strobridge

LOS ANGELES
MCMIV

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Idah Meacham Strobridge

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Idah M. Strobridge

TO THE MEN OF THE DESERT;
but more especially those miners who have grown gray while waiting for their dreams to come true, I dedicate these stories that I found in that land where I, too, dreamed dreams.

FOREWORD

"The palpable sense of mystery in the Desert air breeds fables, chiefly of lost treasure. Somewhere within its stark borders, if one believes report, is a hill strewn with nuggets; one seamed with virgin silver; an old clayey water-bed where Indians scooped up earth to make cooking pots and shaped them reeking with grains of gold. Old miners drifting about the Desert edges, weathered into the semblance of the tawny hills, will tell you tales like these convincingly. After a little sojourn in that land you will believe them on your own account."

MARY AUSTIN,
In "The Land of Little Rain."

Mirages of the Desert

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MIRAGES OF THE DESERT.

Mirages of the Desert.

AWAY back in the old days when the slow-moving ox team dragged its weary way, foot by foot, over the alkali flats and the long streatches of sun-baked soil, where the only growth was the gray sage and the greasewood—away back in those far days—the mirage, that Lorelei of the Desert, was there to lure men on to their destruction.

Great lakes of shining water, where little waves ran up to lap the shore; wide fields of clover and blue grass, that looked so green and cool under the burning sun; forests which reached miles away in a tangle of vine and tree—those were the visions that the Siren of the Dry Lakes showed to the water-starved emigrant of old, and—beckoning—led him on and on, in the pursuit of the unreal, until the picture grew fainter and fainter, and at last down the diminishing perspective of the vision—as he looked—he saw it fade away. The grassy fields where the oxen might have fed, the sparkling waters at which they might have drunk, the broad-leafed shade under which man and beast might have found refreshing rest, were gone! A tantalizing glimpse of Paradise in the great and awful desolation of those Desert days.

Many a poor traveler, led far astray by following the ever-calling, ever-retreating enchantress, has laid down

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at last to die alone in that vast waste, where his bones must bleach in the sun, and his dust must become the sport of the winds of the Desert.

I can recall instances innumerable of emigrant trains deceived by the mirage and led far out of their course, in the hope of reaching the lakes of water that looked so deep and pure.

Down through the valley of the Humboldt, in that part of the great American Sahara which the old emigrant knew so well, they traveled—they whose faces were set toward the land of gold and the setting sun. And there, as they passed along the banks of the long and tortuous Humboldt, they were told a fable that was believed by many a wayfarer of the early days;—that, except fish could be seen swimming about, the waters of the river were poisonous if one drank of them deeply. So people became afraid of it, and went far out of their route to avoid, if possible, drinking the fatal waters of the "River of Death," as it came to be called. Then, when alluring lakes and ponds, and lovely forests and fields spread out, a picture of enchantment before their gaze, is it any wonder that they eagerly hurried onward toward the prospect held out so invitingly toward them?

Only those who have suffered like disappointment can imagine the despair of beholding such a vision dissolve into thin air palpitating in heat waves over the wide plain—as far as the eye could see, only a shimmering haze.

The mirage is, in very truth, a part of the Desert itself—just as the sagebrush, and the coyote, and the little horned toads, and the sand-storms are part. To those who know Desert-land, the picture would be incomplete without them.

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Perhaps the commonest form the mirage assumes is that of bodies of water—from tiny ponds only a few feet across, to great lakes so broad that the farther shore seems beyond the range of vision. I have seen such lakes under the heat of mid-day sun when the quivering air gave them the appearance of crested waves, so like those of reality that were it not for my acquaintance with the topography of the country, as well as the knowledge that I had of the strange forms the mirage takes, I should have felt tempted to believe in their tangibility.

In a few instances I have seen small boats on the surface, the reflection of them in the water being in perfect mimicry of nature's mirroring; and on one occasion, a great ship under full sail—though mistily seen, and seemingly far—rose and fell with the swell of the waves.

Such of these as I myself have seen, have always appeared near the centre of some large alkali flat, where, upon almost any hot spring or summer day, small bodies of water may be seen reflecting the heavens with a deeper blue than the sky was ever known to wear. Sometimes, on the far side of these ponds you may see a wavering border of———what? You look, and look yet again; and still you cannot tell what strange things they may be. Not trees; not human beings; neither are they creatures of the earth, nor of the air, that are moving on the opposite shore. It is something unreal, the presence of which you feel, but cannot explain; something you watch with a delighted fascination; something exquisitely intangible, like the dream of a dream, and as impossible to describe. It must be seen to be understood; no writer's pen, no painter's brush can faithfully portray it.

Early Spring mornings, when the sun rising from behind the purple range of mountains, still cold and

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dark on its western slope, has filled the valley with a soft, golden glow, and lighted the mountains across the way till they begin to take on that delicate tint which only early morning gives, then far down in the valley where the East Range rises up at the left of the southern gateway, the mirage runs riot with its fantastic fashioning.

The mountains alter their outlines so rapidly that the eye can scarce note all their changes. They change from great heights to a low chain of hills; and leap back again, to shoot in spires innumerable into the violet sky, or drop into a long, flat table-land with overhanging top; while, above—in the air—here and there float elongated islands that but a moment before were a part of the mountains beneath—mountains that are being pierced by gigantic caverns through which the sky can be seen. Then they disappear, and island and table-land once more unite; and again a myriad of pinnacles lift themselves from the mass of changing panorama, and the slender shafts reach far into the sky. Then—even as you are watching—one by one they dissolve, and the mountains have resumed their wonted shapes.

Farther down the valley (for this is a particular valley I know, that I am describing here, and for more than a score of years it was my home; and in my heart I have named it the only Home I have—for we loved each other, the Desert and I)—before the days of track and train—there was a station built for the accommodation of passing teamsters. The building had been constructed of time-stained lumber, torn out of the old houses of deserted mining camps in the adjacent mountains. The small, dull-toned, unpainted cabin stood, uncompromising in its plainness, in the midst of a broad, staring, white alkali flat, where the owner of the sta-

tion had previously assured himself of a sufficient water supply. For the establishing of such stations depends largely upon one's being able to obtain an unfailing—if only fairly good—supply of well water. And the location of this station—here in the very centre of a barren, snow-white flat—was the result of his having found the only place where water could be got, by digging for it, within a distance of forty miles. Travel to and from the mines northward was increasing, and with it came an increase in the station-man's sales; for he not only had a "general merchandise store"—though of diminutive proportions—and conducted what he was pleased to call a "stable," but he set forth food for man as well. With his success, came the knowledge that it had created envy in the breast of another—one who would be a rival; for this other declared his intention of erecting at the same point on the road the emigrants traveled, a like establishment, and thus competing with him for their custom.

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Much bitter feeling was expressed, and many hot words passed between them. Finally the station keeper made a threat to kill the other man at sight should he ever bring material there for the construction of a rival house. Matters stood thus for some time, each man waiting for some decisive move on the part of the other. Then the one who claimed prior right to the location, taking his four-horse team, went in to Virginia City for goods to replenish his stock, which the fast increasing Idaho travel was reducing to a small quantity.

On his return trip, when within a mile or two of home, he suddenly noticed opposite his own plainly built little cabin, a fine, large building of new lumber—the brightness of the fresh pine boards putting to shame his own unpretentious and almost shabby-looking house.

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Enraged at the thought that his rival had taken such an advantage as the week's absence had given him, he reached back into the wagon, and got out his Henry rifle. With the cocked weapon laid across his knees—revengeful and determined—he waited impatiently for the heavily laden team to draw near to the spot where he was resolved that his threat, made weeks before, should be put into execution.

There it stood! A two-story house of unpainted pine; its gable to the road, its front door invitingly open, its shutterless windows looking toward the South, as if watching his approach.

He saw it all as plainly as he saw his own poor little home across the way; then—when within less than a hundred yards of it—there was a shivering of the whole scene, and the "opposition" station disappeared into nothingness, leaving but the one building there—the small, solitary house that for several years thereafter stood without rival on the alkali plain.

With the going of the larger building, went also the station-keeper's desire for vengeance; and scarcely a traveller ever stopped at his place afterward who did not hear from him the story of the strange mirage. The name "Mirage" clung to the place, and finally it came to be so christened by the railroad company whose lines passed its door. A siding is there for waiting freights that you glimpse as you flash by in a train made up of "Pullmans;" but the railroad men—when you ask them—will call it "My-ridge." Shadow pictures waver about the place when the summer sun shines hot, but the station built of new pine has never reappeared.

Some localities seem specially adapted to the conditions which invite a mirage. I know of a bush—a large greasewood—out near the middle of a certain smooth, level flat that is over two miles broad and fully twice

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as long, that during the summer months seems always to be wrapped in the mystic mantle of a mirage. Sometimes it has no definite shape, but always the mirage-like effect is there. A road crosses this flat two hundred yards away, and after I first observed the bush, I took pains to notice it particularly, scarcely ever passing it when the days were full of shimmering heat that it did not take on some semblance of flesh and blood. So repeatedly did this seem to occur that I came to call it "My Ghost-Bush," and watched it with an interest that was generally rewarded by having some apparently living form evolve itself from the greasewood's scant and ragged branches.

It is apt to make the shivers run up one's spine to see a harmless looking bush, of a sudden, metamorphose itself into a tall man, and see the man come striding toward you with a long, swinging step; and then—while you are still intently gazing, and wondering where he could have sprung from on that barren Desert bit—as suddenly discover that he is walking away from you—and backwards, at that. An uncanny thing, you may be sure; yet one gets used to it, after a while, and to the knowledge that, after all, it is only one of the many Desert marvels. And dozens of times did I see this great, gaunt man go striding across the level, white plain, and then disappear as though touched by a magician's wand, leaving the lone greasewood standing there instead. Sometimes he seemed to be carrying a roll of blankets on his shoulders, as some poor wayfarers in Desert-land do; and at other times one could have sworn that he was visibly swinging a walking-stick as he went. There were days when the bush, instead of standing there so tall and thin, settled itself down into the semblance of some heavier body; and then one could see a sheep standing at the edge of a little pond as if

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nibbling at the grass that seemed to grow there. At times, it would lift its head as though it looked at you; then as the shimmering of the heat waves increased, it trotted away into the white glare of the summer sunlight, and was no more. Sometimes there were two objects instead of one; but whether moving away across the flat, or standing still by the little patch of imaginary water, their movements were always identical if the mirage was of two.

Once, I remember, it seemed to be an awkward, half-grown girl that moved there; and the point of her big gray shawl—too big, by far, for her slim body—was trailing behind her on the ground.

There have been gulls—ten or twelve seagulls—walking about in the shallow imaginary water, picking at imaginary weeds. And once when there was a large flock of them, and they began to melt into the ether, I found that there were real gulls among them—three of them—that had come far inland from their home by the salt sea, going toward the Lake that is Salt.

But all of these things that were of the mirage-world and without the breath of life, whether slim-built girl, or the man who was of sturdier mould, or the sheep, or the seagulls—all had the trick of moving when I moved, of standing still when I stood still. Then, when I had driven past a certain point in the road, they invariably dissolved, leaving only the heat glimmering across the landscape, and the "ghost bush" there, quiet and alone.

Once, in a rage at the mocking thing, I turned my horses' heads toward it, determined to drive onto it, over it, and crush it down. It irritated me to feel that I could not go by it there on the road without the senseless bush taking unto itself the likeness of some living, breathing thing. I drove hard and straight at it, and

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although there was not a particle of wind stirring the stifling air, yet that miserable bush was swaying back and forth as if waving defiance at me. Whipping up my team, I drove over it, the "off" horse crushing more than half its branches down to the ground. A shiver that ran over me, in spite of the heat of that Desert-day, for the thing had become so real to me as a creature of life, that I almost expected it to shriek out in pain as its crooked, misshapen branches cracked and snapped under the hoofs of the horses.

It has never been my good fortune to meet any of the old-fashioned ghosts that go up and down the earth with rattling bones and a musty smell—the kind that leave a splotch of blood on everything they touch, but I doubt if they are any more uncanny than a gray wraith evolved out of a greasewood bush by the aid of a mirage.

We do not always recognize a mirage as such when we see one, or experience the "creepy" feeling that a meeting with ghosts is supposed to engender. Among the memories I have of things that were, in the gray country, is one of driving along a dusty road on a hot August day, and seeing some little distance ahead of me, through a blur of dust that seemed to rise from the road, a six-horse wagon driven by a man wearing a red shirt. The wagon, which looked to be heavily loaded with sacks of grain, appeared to have been once painted a bright blue, and the running-gear an equally vivid red—colors now dulled by dust and time. A cloud of fine, flour-like alkali arose about the wheels and around the horses' hoofs.

With my thoughts elsewhere, though with eyes upon this not unusual sight upon the traveled roads of Desert-land, I watched it for more than a quarter of an hour, as it seemed to jolt and bump along its way. Although

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I was driving rapidly that I might reach it and pass it, and so be beyond the dust that seemed to be stirred up by the wheels, and which would soon be floating back and covering me, yet I did not seem to gain upon it. Finally I noticed that it moved only as I did. Then, when horses, and wagon, and driver, and the dust from the powdered white earth had disappeared, I realized that it had been but a mirage. Accustomed as I had long been to seeing them in all their varying guises, not for one instant had I suspected what it really was. I have counted it among the most remarkable mirages I have ever known of, because its coloring was so bright; the apparently new, vivid red shirt the man wore was a quite unusual bit of mirage color. For these Desert wraiths choose robes of dull grays, or browns that are dull and dim; unless it may be in the blue of sky and the water, or the green of grass and the trees.

Then, I remember once seeing the red dress of a woman reflected in a mirage that took the form of a small and shallow pond that seemed to lie between that part of a "dry lake" over which a road passed, along which she was driving with a companion, and another point half a mile away where I was driving along another—and parallel—road. The bright color of her dress, the man's darker clothing, the horses (one black, the other white), the wagon, were all reflected with wonderful exactitude in the simulated water. These people I knew; and afterward; when speaking to them about it, they too said they had seen the mirage of the pond lying between us, and had remarked upon the vividness with which my reflection was shown there. Although we were such a distance apart, yet each of us could see the movement of the horses' feet reflected in the water. Unlike the former mirage I had

seen where the red had shown with such brilliancy, here the color was real—only the reflection of the woman's red dress in the mirage-lake being the unreality.

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Of all the wonderful pictures painted by this artist of the atmosphere—and I have seen many—there was never one which in magnitude, in grandeur, in beauty of form and tinting, even remotely approached one which I witnessed in the spring of 1869.

It was about two hours after sunrise—the magic time the mirage chooses for its most ideal forms—when I happened to notice that the portion of Eugene Mountain known as the Woody Cañon district was undergoing one of those marvellous transformations so frequent in the rarified air and high altitude of that section. The change from the dull reddish hue of the rugged mountain to all of the loveliest tints that the mind can imagine, was rapid. The early morning sun had filled the valley with a warm yellow light, and one seemed to be looking through a golden veil at the gigantic castle that fashioned itself from the mountain's rocky top. Turrets, and round towers, and battlemented walls; graceful arches, and windows, narrow and long, were all there—parts of a structure stupendously magnificent in its beautiful gradations of color, violet, purple and lightest rose. But even as with subdued breath—lest a sigh of delight or a word ever so softly spoken might dispel it—I watched its rare and exquisite beauty, it faded away, and again the rough contour of Eugene Mountain loomed up where the mystical, mythical castle had been but a moment before. Such a gorgeous representation of magnificent architecture in such beautiful coloring never again was presented to the delighted quartette which witnessed that bewildering fantasy of Nature.

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To those who know the Desert's heart, and—through years of closest intimacy—have learned to love it in all its moods, it has for them something that is greater than charm, more lasting than beauty, yet to which no man can give a name. Speech is not needed, for they who are elect to love these things understand one another without words; and the Desert speaks to them through its silence.

To others—those who need words and want people in numbers—the Desert is but a gray waste of sand and sagebrush, lying in pitiful loneliness under a gray sky.

Utter desolation! To-day is like yesterday—to-morrow will be like to-day. The sun rises each morning upon a scene which never alters, except when a change is wrought by the mirage in its illusive, elusive mystery.

THE MYTHS OF THE DESERT.

Myths of the Desert.

BUT the Desert showed another mirage than that of grass-bordered water-stretches, to the men who came a-search for gold in the Days of 'Forty-Nine; so that—even to this hour—some are still striving to reach it, away out there in the sand wastes.

The mines of old called men out of the East, to seek a fortune in the State that borders the sunset sea. And there they washed gold from the creek and river-bed in quantities sufficient, one would think, to stay the prospector's feet from wandering further. Yet many there were who—after crossing the plains—were lured back to sagebrush-land by the fabulous tales of gold and silver there; and so have lived more than a double score of years in the land of the mirage, seeking some mirage-mine.

Rich ledges in plenty are there, but not to the North in the lava country. Some knew where to find them; and the men who mined them have grown rich and gone away. Of them I do not speak. My tales, instead, are of those fanatical prospectors who are ever striving for the rainbow's end in their quest for rainbow-gold.

Into the gray Desert (a land of gray sage, and gray sand; of lizards, and little horned-toads that are gray; a land where the coyote drifts by you, like a fragment

Myths of the Desert.

from gray fog-banks blown by the wind), half a century ago, they came—the prospectors—seeking silver or gold. And some yet seek, in places where there is none. Some are following the mirage still.

Once—long ago—my horse and I went away into the mirage-land of these old miners; and there I heard them voice the stories of their hopes—the dreams that they believe will some day come true. By camp-fire smoke, or in the dim light of sod cabins, I have sat in the silence the Desert teaches, and have listened as they talked, and believed while I listened. Yes, even believed; as you, too, will believe if you hear from their own lips the fables that seem so true during the hour you are under the story-teller's charm, with no sound breaking in save the crooning of the Desert wind or the cry of a lone coyote. One must sleep well, and dream of other things, before the coming of the time that will bring disbelief.

They are only miners' fables; but they sounded true. And for an evening and a day I believed them. And I am glad I believed. If I had not—if I had been a doubter—those hours would have lacked just what makes them now among my dearest kept memories. And if you, who read these re-told tales, are of those who have heard the Voice of the Desert speaking, I know you will understand.

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THE SECRET MINE OF THE BROWN MEN.

RIDING for weeks up and down trails that took me into cañons and over roads that crossed the alkali levels of the wide, still country tucked away under the northernmost shelter of Nevada, it was no difficult mental process to put myself back half a century in time's reckoning and feel that I was one of those Desert voyagers of long ago.

As they saw it, so can we see it today; so little has man disturbed the landscape. Nature's visible processes are slow, and few people find their way here, for mankind to make "improvements." The broad, far-reaching picture remains, as the still years slip by, mostly unchanged.

On the earth's well-traveled roads you never saw such pictures as these! Not only are they beautiful, but they are different—and all that implies! Look! Under a summer sun's shimmering light, distance paints the far ranges faintly in all the colors of the spectrum, while the near mountains rise about you, gray and grim. Over there is the blending of the mountain's blue and violet tintings; here a gray-banded cone rises, its western side furrowed and seamed like an old frontiersman's face. Between, lie miles and miles of drab-colored plain spotted with leper-patches of alkali—wide plains that reach from ridges of gaunt, gray slate

to far-away hyacinthine hills. Someone tells you that those distant ranges are red-brown when you reach them; but now they are a lovely, delicate mauve, veiled as they are by the mists of distance.

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And so, before you, day by day, as you go riding away out of noisyland into the big silence, you find thousands of pictures to delight the eye and charm the senses into a long-continued joy—such joy as only the Desert can give.

Turn your horse's head to the right, here! Ahead of you are the foothills—a double row of saffron-colored buttes, each capped with outcroppings of rough and craggy brown-black rocks. Ride over them, and you will see fissures where, down in the cleavage, are clay cliffs among buried coal cinders left by the great conflagration. Higher, the mountain is striped horizontal-wise in vivid coloring; each shade marked in broad, glaring bands, bench above bench, with the vigor and boldness of a painter who lays his colors on with a pallette-knife. Rocks run riot in their medley of coloring; striking—indescribable. You lope your horse along a "wash" leading down from the higher slopes, thick strewn with brightness as a springtime hillside in bloom. It is graveled with water-worn pebbles, brilliant and of variegated shades, with here and there big cobbles of the same. Not striped, not mottled, not merely faint tints of coloring, but of a uniform depth of rich purple, or blood-red, green, or yellow, or blue—every stone. So bright, and so many! Yet among them all is never a hint, so far as you can see, of galena, iron pyrites, or mineral of any sort—minerals of value or valueless ones that might suggest the proximity of others of real worth. In all your experience you have never come across a district so barren in its "indications." Yet among these vari-tinted

mountains many a miner still is hunting for silver or gold that he heard of in the long ago—one of the many mythical mines that are believed in still.

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Your eyes are never at rest, but go seeking new delights all the while, as you ride through the enchanted silence. Over there are vaporous mountains—soft, violet visions of mystic regions far, far beyond; here is all that is grotesque, freaks in color and formation. Such odd mountains, such fantastic hills, they are! Look at those lying northwest! Below, they are low and smooth—round buttes of lemon-yellow, shading into a glaring ochre; back of them, and higher, rise beetling crags that lift crests in battlement and turret, all ebony or burnt umber. On the one hand, perhaps, the hills are grimly gray; on the other, they are wrapped in wavering tints soft as the coloring on a wood-dove's breast.

The delight of it all, the charm, grows on you as the miles lengthen out; and you forget heat and fatigue and the comforts you left back where civilization waits your return. You only know that it is good—vastly good—to live! Just to feel yourself drawing the breath of life is enough, while taking your outing in this far-away corner, where you seem to have the whole earth and sky to yourself. What more would you? The biggest, most beautiful of pictures make the rim of the world here, to repeat themselves in wavering mirages on the levels that lie within the circle of the skyline.

It is, in truth, a land of mirages; but those you see dissolving into the ether, as you draw close to their fanciful outlines, are not the ones that were the lures bringing many a traveler into this enchanted land. Scarcely a day, riding through its length and breadth, did I journey there that I did not hear tales of fairy-weave about hidden gold—of mines that men search for year in and

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year out, never finding, but always expecting to find tomorrow—the next day—next week—or the week after. They are always sure of standing on the very brink of discovery. You look about you, you look at them, and you wonder at their faith. To the average prospector, there is nothing suggesting either gold or silver thereabouts; yet among the old guard that brought Nevada into prominence as a mining State, are many who have grown old in the service they have given a useless quest. Scarcely a cañon of these rainbow-ranges alternated with others of Desert-gray, that does not have its story of a "lost mine." Dozens of such have I listened to in that country. At nightfall when we would sit outside the cabin door, an old man, between puffs on his pipe, would tell a tale he fondly believed; or on some rainy day before a huge sagebrush fire, have I hearkened as the story-teller poked at the coals with a poker made from a miner's "spoon"; or up on the heights, while I sat in the saddle and leaned down to some old prospector who declared his certainty that those very mountain heights held the long unfounded mine—his very own. Mirage-mines are they; yet the men who tell the myths, alas! believe them true.

One night, as the stars came out, after we had eaten by the campfire's warmth, at a camp made on the edge of one of the "dry lakes" in which the Desert abounds, looking into the glow of the greasewood coals, I heard this tale from one of its believers:

Years and years ago, over the California State-line, Job Taylor kept a trading post in Indian Valley. He was one of the earliest pioneers; and after establishing the post—much frequented by Indians who sometimes paid for their purchases in gold dust—he was greatly astonished one day at having payment tendered him, by one of the Indians, in nuggets of extraordinary size.

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These, he declared (when relating the incident afterward), were as large as hen's eggs. The questions he put to the Indian as to the locality where they were procured, brought forth no answer. No satisfactory replies whatever were obtained from the brown man, who hastened to get away.

The following year the same Indian came again to the trading post; and again he offered nuggets of unusual size in payment for his purchases. Again Taylor importuned him to tell where they were found; but he met with no satisfaction. It was not until a year later that Taylor succeeded in making a sufficiently good impression on the Indian to encourage his confidence. Then he said that, for a certain amount of goods from the post, he would tell Taylor all he knew of the place; and for a further consideration he would take him there. The agreement being satisfactorily made, Capt. Wetherell—an old Indian fighter of experience—was induced to join them. Well equipped for such an undertaking, the three started out, setting their faces to the east, to find the place that the Indian described as containing so great a number of mammoth nuggets. It was a creek, he said—a fine stream filled with mountain trout, and sheltered in part by many trees.

From Indian Valley they went to Susanville, and then—keeping on the Honey Lake road—camped one night by the springs at Deep Hole. It was while they were there that the Indian said to them: "Two more sleeps, and we get there! I know."

Just at that time—the precise year I have forgotten—old Winnemucca, chief of the Paiutes (he for whom the town of Winnemucca was named), was camped on Granite Creek Mountain; and to him the Indian bore a message from some of his people, across the line in California. It was while they were at Deep Hole that the

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Indian said: "I got go see ol' Winnemuc', an' tell um what them Injun say. You wait here. I come back pretty quick."

On the following day he returned to them, downcast, and the bearer of disheartening news. He had told the old chief, he said, of their expedition, and Winnemucca had become very angry—he was "heap mad," he said. Further, the chief declared he would have him killed if he took these men farther on their quest; for—he had argued to the younger man—if white men found gold there, they would come in numbers so great as to frighten away much of the game—the deer, the antelope, and the mountain sheep—on which the Indians principally relied for subsistence. The Indian would be the sufferer if the white man came; in no wise would he gain by their coming. Hence, the search must be abandoned.

Entreaties — threats — promises — bribes! they all availed nothing. The old man's edict was irrevocable, so it would be useless for the white men to go to him (as they discussed doing) for favor. The Indian himself would do nothing more. That, under the changed conditions, he would forfeit all the goods at the trading post that he had bargained for, seemed, to him, a matter of utter indifference.

So the two men made their way back to California; and neither Captain Wetherell nor Job Taylor ever saw the Indian again. Whether it was that the old chief had given him orders to shun the White Man lest the secret be wrested from him, or whether he had no more gold to offer in exchange for clothing and food, no one could say. Only of this were they sure; never again did he come to the post.

However, the following year, a young Indian—a mere boy—came with nuggets similar to those that had been

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previously offered to Taylor. The boy had no hesitation in talking about them and said, in reply to his questioners, that some of the old men of the tribe had gathered the gold, but that he, himself, had never seen the place from whence it was obtained. They had told him, he said, that he was yet too young to be shown the way to the cañon, though he had been taken by them to other cañons near by. But he declared that though he had never seen the exact place, he had attentively listened to the talk of his elders each time they returned with treasure, when the whole camp had gathered about in council as to the best method of disposing of it; and from their description of the cañon, and his own knowledge of adjacent localities, he was sure he could find the nuggets' hiding place.

The white man made tempting inducements for the boy to guide him to the spot; but he was reluctant to do so. He repeated the declaration of the old men of the tribe that he was "too young," and that they would "get heap mad" should he take white men there. But, finally, he admitted that he knew an old man who was in disfavor with the rest of the tribe, who had gathered some of the gold, and might be induced to act as their guide. "I take you go see him," said the boy; "then maybe he show you place. Him live by Deep Hole."

Taylor, Wetherell and the boy set out; and over the same road they had traveled when the older Indian was guide. At Deep Hole, too, they found the old Indian whom the boy declared they would find. They saw him, but that was all. There was more to be desired than the mere sight of the old gray-haired Indian, whom they believed to have taken nuggets from the

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unknown cañon. Alien he might be from the rest of the tribe, yet he was loyal to their interests. The eager prospectors found him absolutely dumb when information was desired. He would give them no intelligent answers whatever. To all questioning they got but the stereotyped reply of the Indian who does not want to talk: "Me no savvy. Me no know." Nor could they get more than that from him through the two days they lingered there for that purpose. Every artifice to induce him to disclose his secret, failed. He had evidently been impressed by the warning of Chief Winnemucca; and tribal traditions constrained him to silence. And when an Indian elects to keep closed lips, the Sphinx is not more dumb.

Then the two men got the boy to one side, and sternly demanded some knowledge of the gold's locality. The little fellow was frightened at the threatening manner Capt. Wetherell assumed, and—half-crying—promised to take them there if he could. He was far from sure of the precise cañon it might be, but he knew of the locality, and had a general knowledge of the mountain itself. He would make an effort—he would try—maybe he could take them there; the things the old Indians had told in his presence, when returning to their camps with the great nuggets of gold, were not forgotten, and these memories would be his guide.

"Come on. I think may be so I fin' it," he said; and the journey was resumed.

Both men noticed that their route continued in the same direction indicated by the other Indian as being "two sleeps" further on. At the end of the first of these two days of travel, while lying in their blankets at night, supposing the boy asleep, Capt. Weth-

erell said to Job Taylor: "If that Injun fails to show us the place, I'll make short work of him!" It is to be doubted if the captain meant more than to express his emphatic annoyance at the way their progress was being discouraged by guides who deserted, and guides who would give no information as to things one wanted to know. But certainly the threat must have sounded ominous enough to one small guide to warrant his desertion. For the captain's indiscretion cost him and Taylor dear. Morning came; but the boy was gone.

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Gone, as a whirlwind that dissolves itself in the Desert! And the place, so far as they knew, nor the men, ever knew him more. He had overheard the threat; and fearing, no doubt, that he might not succeed in the search, and in terror of possible results, at day-dawn he had put miles and miles between him and the rough-spoken white man who had planted terror in his young heart.

Frequent search was made afterward for the lost Indian diggings, but they keep their secret still. There is a cañon a mile and a half east of Ebling's, in Virgin Valley, in northeastern Humboldt county, that men declare to be the one the Indians worked in days of old. It is also believed by many to be the one where the famous "Blue Bucket" gold was found. The tale goes that these two lost placers are the same—the "Blue Bucket" mines, and those which the Indian has always kept hidden from the White Man.

Though it is now impassable for wagons, yet the older Indians living there, say that, years and years ago, when the first white men came into the country on their way to the West, many of them passed down the narrow and deep gorge above Ebling's, which though al-

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ways difficult, is now impossible to travel of any sort—even passage on foot may be won only at great risk of life or limb. No faintest trace of wagon road, nor even the slightest mark of trail is there. During the last forty years great masses of rock have been continually falling, and have choked the way. The few of recent years who have undertaken it afoot, have stories of uncounted hardships to tell.

It may be (if you choose to believe it so), that this is truly the cañon of the Indians' secret diggings. It may be that this is really the cañon of the lost "Blue Bucket" gold. It may be that these were, after all, but mirage mines; but whatever the truth, the search goes on—goes on.

THE CHARM OF THE DESERT.

VERY likely such a tale seems absurd to you, as you read it between the covers of a book, the while surrounded by the things that make a busy, people-full world. But do not give voice to that disbelief. Not even to yourself must you confess your own incredulity, lest it may prove a thorn in the flesh if you should go into Desert ways some day. For there may come to you some time a twilight hour that shall find you in greasewood-land, and a guest at the campfire of some one of those old prospectors whose guest I, too, have been. Then he himself, you may be sure, will tell you this story. He will tell it to you in almost the very words I have used; but it will have a quality which my own story-telling has not—that of carrying conviction to your heart.

For you will believe. Ay! you will believe it is true; you will believe that there is a marvel of gold there for the lucky one who is to find it.

There, at the end of day, by the drifting blue smoke from the sagebrush campfire—where he has boiled the coffee that you will declare the best that was ever brewed—with the Desert's weirdness creeping up to you with the dusk, while you eat of the strips of bacon your host has cooked and the bread he has baked in the ashes, you will gladly and greedily listen to the

The Charm of the Desert.

story again. And then—when you hear him tell it in the way that he told it to me—you will believe it true. The charm of the Desert will be all about you; the mystery of the Desert will move you in ways that you have never known. Strange thoughts will be yours, of things that—in that strange land—in your heart, you feel might very well be. And of the truth of what you may hear, you will not question.

There are those who have asked me: "What is the charm of the Desert? What is there in the Desert that makes you care for it so? What constitutes its hold on those who have love for its solitude?"

I would answer the last question first. Its hold upon its lovers is the very love they give. For to love is to hold out one's wrists for the shackles to be snapped thereon. It does not matter to what or to whom love is given, it is so—always. So I have answered you this question. But, the others—Its charm? And why does one care?

How can one convey meaning to another in a language which that other does not understand? I can only tell you the charm of the Desert, when you, too, have learned to love it. And then there will be no need for me to speak.

But this much I may say that you will understand: In the Desert all things seem possible. If you ask me, again, "Why?" then I cannot tell you; only I know it is so.

Perhaps that accounts for the faith of the old prospectors.

THE QUEST OF OLD MAN BERRY.

THE faith of the old prospectors! There is no other such blind faith in the world.

Take up your map of the Western States. There, where the great Oregon lava flow laps over the State line of Nevada, in the northwestern corner, lies the Black Rock country. Out there in that sweep of gray sand and sage-levels, and grim heights—the scaling of which—taxes the soul sorely, I found him—the typical prospector, "Old Man Berry," or "Uncle Berry," they called him. Over eighty years old he was, and for more than fifty years of his life led by the lure of a mirage.

All day I had been traveling over alkali flats and greasewood-covered mesas, to reach—in late afternoon—the upper tablelands. They were dotted with mountain mahogany, and slashed with cañons where streams ran bordered with cottonwood and aspen.

It was already dusk when we began our descent of one of the larger cañons, and quite dark when we stopped at the ranch-house doorway, through which the lamplight streamed—the friendliest sight a Desert wayfarer ever "meets up with."

We had come upon one of those small ranches that are tucked away in the heights, where old prospectors are as sure to drift to, when not out in the

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mountains with poll-pick and hammer, as though they —like the ranchman's collie or the cat curled up on the bunk—were among the assets of the place.

He was tall and spare—gaunt, you would have called him; and you would have noticed at once how bowed he was. But not as other old men on whom age has rested a heavy hand. It was the head, not the back, that was bowed—as though he had walked long years, and far, with his eyes upon the ground. When he lifted them quickly—looking directly into your own—you found they were bright and piercing, with a keenness that belonged to a man forty years his junior; and you felt that his sight reached away beyond—to things not of your reckoning.

We speak of beards that are "snow-white," and and usually it is a misapplied term. His was really white as snow—white as freshly fallen snow is white, with thick and long hair to match. A patriarch of the mountains, he; you would have declared.

Except as you noted his trembling hands, and saw how heavily he leaned his weight against the staff he carried as he walked, you did not feel he was old—rather it was as though, of his own choice, he wrapped himself in a dignity of years—wearing it as a monarch wears his robes of state, in no wise to be counted as the mark of flying Time.

Indeed, there was something royal about the old man; and you might join the others (the ranch hands, and the teamsters, and the cowboy crew) in good-humored scoffing at the old man himself, as well as his hobbies, when his back was turned. Yet, not you, nor any man among them dared to jest ever so lightly to his face. He commanded your respect. And you, too, would have shown him the same deference as they did, whenever he spoke. Somehow, one feels more or less

a coward to try to disabuse a man of his faith in a thing that he has believed in with all his soul for a lifetime. So it is the kinder way, even as it is the easier way, to listen as they tell of such things as you, perhaps, may doubt.

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That night, after the supper dishes had been cleared away, and the others had gone out to sit in the darkness, and smoke, and talk over the day's work and the plans for the morrow, while the crickets sang their night-song to the stars, Old Man Berry and I sat by the bare pine table, by the wind-blown flame of a flaring kerosene lamp, while he told me of his quest for a mine he had been seeking for more than half a hundred years.

Back in the days of the young century when he had crossed the plains, while camping at the point of Black Rock, he had found a bit of "float." Small, it was, but so rich in gold that it scarcely seemed real. It was lying at the edge of the well-traveled road where it almost touches the foothills. He looked about everywhere for others of the same sort. That one wonderful nugget was all that he found.

The old man unfastened his shirt-front, and drew from his breast a buckskin bag—a crudely constructed affair that bespoke his own handiwork. It hung suspended from his neck by a buckskin string. Old Man Berry handled it as though it were something holy, turning it over and over, as though weighing it. Finally he untied the string, and turned the bag upside down. The nugget struck heavily on the boards of the table. It was a wonder! Enough, and more than enough to drive any man mad with the gold fever.

"Nuggets like these don't just happen anywhere—as if they were made in the sky, and let fall," he said. "They come from a ledge—carried down to the flats

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by the forces of Nature. They are like strangers down there—their home is in the mountains. This came from the mountains—the mountain back of Black Rock. There is a ledge there somewhere. Where—in what cañon or on what ridge? Maybe it is a long, long way from there; for 'float' travels a long way sometimes. Where is it—where? Where will I find it, and when? But I will find it! I'll find it, so help me God! Why, I have almost found it now—almost, but not quite. For I've found a place that tallies with the Frenchman's story, and what the Padre told. I may find it next week; and it will be MINE! There are tons and tons of gold like this, where this came from."

He was talking fast and feverishly, and I saw he was no longer talking to me, but rather thinking aloud. He had forgotten me—his surroundings—everything, except the one thing he never forgot, sleeping or waking.

For a long time he sat there, turning his fetish over and over in his knotty and weathered hands. I hardly breathed as I watched him—never moving, my eyes on the nugget, too. Somehow I had caught sight of the face of the Siren, and was one with him, for the time.

Suddenly he seemed to remember me, and he hastily put the nugget back in the little bag, and slipped it again into his breast. I could hear the men lazily talking where they leaned back against the walls of the sod house; and an owl hooted over at the barn. The chirping of the crickets sounded shriller than ever from their cover in the tall weeds and nettles down by the creek. I heard it all as in a dream. There was something unreal in all the sounds. Nothing seemed real and believable, except the sight of the nugget of virgin gold, and the tale of Old Man Berry.

By and by, I heard him talking again—telling me

how, at that time, he had ventured to stay in the country for a few days, to prospect in the hope of finding the ledge. Not for long, however; for he dare not risk the savages, or draw too heavily on his food supply which was barely enough to see him through to California. The delay brought him no reward. He found no ledge; neither did he find any sign of mineral in all the district. He was forced to abandon, for the time being at least, his quest, and to push on to the sea. Once there, however, he was impatient to get back; and again he returned to the sagebrush country. Once more his quest brought him nothing, and he was forced to return to the coast. So he went back and forth between the sea and the sagebrush; and finally he came to stay. Now he had been here for so long, that he could not count the years. And, anyway, what did it matter? Few, or many, it was all the same to him.

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"There are others—reliable people, I'd have you know—who know that there is gold here," he said. Then he went on to tell me the Padre's story:

Away back in the years that were gone, a California miner, while journeying through Mexico, took the opportunity offered him by a Mexican friend, to examine some of the old Spanish archives preserved there. The friend had noted in what he had read, that gold had been discovered in a locality that—as he rightly thought—would be crossed by the old emigrant road. Knowing this friend from the North was well acquainted with the country, he called his attention to it.

There—recorded by a Padre long dead—was an elaborate account of a wonderful find of gold, made by the Padre himself when he was a Desert-voyager through a country hundreds of miles to the North, in what was then Spanish possessions. The record gave latitude and longitude of the place, and noted many important

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landmarks, to guide the ones whom the Padre was to lead there when he could organize an expedition. But the Padre had fallen ill—was sick unto death, and had died. Yet not before he had made a map of the country, and which was on record with the description of his journey's discovery.

With these to assist him in his search, the miner started on his northward way into the country of the great plains. The Padre's description of certain boiling springs which this miner found, and camped at for a number of days, tallies precisely with that given by Fremont in his journal. The latter says:

"The basin of the largest one has a circumference of several hundred feet; but there is at one extremity a circular space of about fifteen feet in diameter entirely occupied by boiling water. It boils up at irregular intervals, and with much noise. The water is clear, and the spring is deep. A pole about sixteen feet long was easily immersed in the centre; but we had no means of forming a good idea of its depth. It was surrounded on the margin with a border of green grass," (the date of this entry was January) "and near the shore the temperature of the water was 206 degrees. We had no means of ascertaining that of the centre, where the heat was greatest; but, by dispersing the water with a pole, the temperature of the margin was increased to 208 degrees, and in the centre it was doubtless higher. By driving the pole towards the bottom, the water was made to boil up with increased force and noise. There are several other interesting places, where water and smoke and gas escape, but they would require a long description. The water is impregnated with common salt, but not so much as to render it unfit for general cooking; and a mixture of snow made it pleasant to drink."

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Now the miner found the boiling springs that the Padre found, and that Fremont tells of. The latitude and longitude, as given by Fremont in his journal, is precisely that given by the Padre. Then the record of the Padre's travels tells how he went still farther north, and to what is now the Oregon State line, or very nearly so far. The miner and the companion on the trip followed as their compass led, while they neared the place where the holy father had seen the fabulous gold ledge, along the Honey Lake Valley road, as far as Buffalo Springs in Northern Nevada. There, their course took them away from the traveled road, and they struck out across an unknown country, going N.—N-E. To Pueblo Mountain it led them—not so far north as the road that goes through High Rock cañon, though up to the mountain's very edge.

But of ledge they found no sign. Yet when leaving there, the morning they were packing up their camp outfit, they found two small nuggets, which proved that there was gold there; and these nuggets were similar in appearance to the large one Old Man Berry had found.

How did they come there? "Uncle Berry" declared that they had been carried away from Black Rock mountain by some prospector, who had lost them from his pack while journeying farther north. Though why he should say that, I don't know; for he believes that there is a continuous ledge, over a hundred miles long, reaching from some point near Double Hot Springs, away to Pueblo Mountain—the Giant Ledge of the World!

So, though the nugget he had found and those found by the miner lay that distance apart, yet Old Man Berry declares they could only come from one and the same ledge.

Then he reminded me that Pueblo Mountain was

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but a short distance from the place where Stoddard had found nuggets in the "Three Little Lakes of Gold," nor was it far from where the emigrants found the gold that came from the "Blue Bucket Mines"; so that it is easy to account for all the scattered bits of gold found through the length and breadth of that barren land. A mammoth ledge is there—miles upon miles wide, and hundreds of miles long—but only in one or two places does it show itself in croppings; and only by the few nuggets that men have found, has it ever made itself known.

Then the old man commenced telling of another proof (he calls it) of his theory. Years ago, a Frenchman who was traveling eastward through Surprise Valley, found a cave that was studded with gold. It lies about forty miles distant from the California State line. The Frenchman had gone in to seek shelter from a storm. The day was cold, and it was snowing bitterly, so that he built a fire of the roots and stumps of sagebrush that he brought in from outside. As the fire blazed up, and the light flooded the cavern, he saw scattered over the floor great nuggets of gold that shone in the fire-glow. The floor sloped away up to the rear, where the cave narrowed to a mere slit in the rock, and so barred a man from going farther. Taking up a firebrand, he thrust his arm in there as far as he could stretch it; it lit up the farther recesses, and he beheld there—far beyond his reach—innumerable nuggets of the shining yellow metal. It seemed unbelievable!

From the floor of that portion where he stood, he gathered all there were; and these he tied up in a cotton flour-sack, and fastened behind his saddle when he went away. The jogging motion of the horse, wore a hole in the sack, and many of these (in fact, most of

them) he lost upon the way. When he missed them he retraced his steps as nearly as he could, but the drifting snow had covered up his horse's footprints, and he found none of those he had dropped. Some, however, remained in a corner of the sack that was tied with the buckskin strings of his saddle. These, he took with him to his home in Sacramento, where he lived with a couple named Butler. He was exhausted from the long trip, and ill from exposure. He became desperately ill. Until he died, he was nursed by Butler and his wife, to whom he gave the nuggets. And to them he gave a detailed description of the locality in which he found the wonder-cave of the Desert. He described the formation of the cave as being of water-worn pebbles and fine crumbled rock, embedded in a formation similar to concrete. All through that district he had found great cliffs and many caves—caves of all sorts. Just about there, he found a number that were in form like unto this one—as of water-worn rock that was burrowed full of holes. But in none of them, except this particular one, did he find gold. Here, they were either lying loose on the floor of the cave, or embedded in the soft rock, from which he dug many of them with his penknife—aiding the work by breaking away the rock with a loose stone.

He gave the Butlers a rough chart he made of the country. To the south, it showed the boiling springs that Fremont and the Padre found; and the dotted line he drew took one on the way to Pueblo Mountain. The Butlers went there, after their friend had died; and they spent many a month in a useless quest. But it did not lessen their belief that the cave of the wonder-gold is there—somewhere. They have the nuggets still, and will show them to you as proof.

A dozen other instances did Old Man Berry tell me,

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as we sat there in the little sod house, and the men gossipped and smoked outside. But by and by they came in, and then the old man would say no more. Perhaps he knew they were skeptics, and so would not invite derision.

The next morning, after I had gone down to the cabin from where I had slept the sleep of those who are elect to find rest under the arching, star-studded sky, I found myself the last one at the breakfast table. So that, when I had finished, and had gone outside again, I found the others gathered about the corral where they were assisting "Uncle Berry" get his horses hitched to what passed for a wagon. Such a marvel of inadequacy I never have seen, as the "team" he was to use in getting off into the Desert where the lure of the gold—a veritable mirage—was calling him!

Originally intended for a small delivery wagon, it had long borne no likeness to any sort of a vehicle whatever. There was no dashboard. There was no seat. The double-trees were home-made; and the tongue was a cottonwood pole. Missing spokes in the wheels were replaced by the limbs of the quaking asp; and the reach itself was pieced with a pole used as a splice. The tires were wired on with baling wire—wound round and round with the wire, till the tire itself was scarcely to be seen. Wire all over the wagon; wire to mend the harness. The reins were of bits of old straps fastened together; and wouldn't have held a runaway pair of kittens. He had a dry willow switch for a whip. One of the horses was too old to have been properly apportioned to anything in this world, except to the filling of a grave in a horse-graveyard. The other was a half-broken colt.

Again, he was starting off for Black Rock. Alone, of course; for he would have none with him on a trip

like this, lest they see where he went, and so—perhaps —some time wrest the Mine of the World from him. No; there were none he would trust. Did not a nephew come out of the East to pave the way to becoming his heir, against the hour the old man should discover the ledge and——then die. And did not this same nephew, who began by calling him "Dear Uncle Berry," end by cursing him for an "old fool," and then go away leaving the old man laid up with a crushed ankle— Did he not, all the while, and secretly, try to find the ledge for himself? No; he would have none of them. He was sufficient unto himself. He needed no one.

The colt was acting badly, and two of the cowboys were getting him into the harness—lightly dodging his heels which he lashed out viciously at them, or springing quickly aside as he reared and came down "spiking" at them with his fore-legs.

After a good deal of manoeuvering, they got him blindfolded, and finally into the harness. One of the men held the colt by the head, while old "Uncle Berry" climbed up and seated himself on his roll of blankets, which—in lieu of any other—served as a seat.

There was a look of determination on his face that did me good to see. It was the grim look that a face takes on when its owner has the knowledge that he has met a worthy foe, yet he has willed to fight to the end. It stirred my blood with admiration to see him.

There he was—more than eighty-four years of age, and yet able to climb cliffs, and peck away at the rock that lies at the tops of the mountains. Why! they told me, he would ride this unbroken colt—and did, often— if the men would help him to mount.

Such goods as he got for his small needs, must come from towns a hundred miles distant; and to them (through the winter's snow-drifts, or under the Desert's

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dizzying sun)—alone—in that old rattletrap of a wagon, would he go. Truly, the old man was the personification of "Western pluck."

He was thinly clad, and through the threadbare cotton shirt he wore, one could see the framework of the great, gaunt body. Somehow, the other men standing about (cowboys, and ranch hands, and teamsters), seemed puny beside him,—feeble though he was, and an octogenarian.

He nodded "good by" to us. Then—"Ready!" and a pause. "Let them go!" he said; and the man at the young horse's head, pulled off the blind and jumped back. The colt reared on his haunches—pawed the air with his hoofs, and leaped forward—almost jerking the old buckskin horse off his feet, as he went. Old Man Berry sat there—his feet braced far apart; his gray hair blowing back in the rush of wind that came up the cañon; his knotted hands gripping the reins; and that grim look on his face that made you feel that he, after all, was master of whatever he undertook.

So, down the steep cañon, through a cloud of alkali dust he went. And every instant I expected to see the old wagon go to pieces.

"God! but he's got pluck!" said one of the cowboys, turning away as "Uncle Berry" went out of sight round a bend. "They ain't nary thing that old feller won't tackle, just give him the chanst. He's clean grit, through and through!"

He was grit.

Two days later, when we came down to the ranch after a day of deer-hunting on the heights, there—at the haystack, contentedly feeding—stood Old Man Berry's horses. They were necked together just as he had left them when he had turned them out at night, to graze on the scant growth of artemisia down on the

Desert, and they—led by the instinct that guides home-lovers—had come straightaway to their mountain home. The horses were well and safe, but——Where was Old Man Berry?

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There was not one of us who did not feel (though no one dared voice that fear) that down on the alkali flats somewhere—far from water—they would find Something that would be a horror to see.

The ranchman ordered work in the corrals stopped, and hurried the men on swift errands he directed. To the creek, to fill canteens and demijohns with water; to the house for blankets; to the barn for horses to be put to the wagon, and others to be saddled. Every man was to aid in the work of rescue. Scarcely one of them spoke, but all wore sobered faces. Not one among them but that loved the old man; "loco" though they declared him to be.

I watched them go down the cañon, as I had watched him go such a short time before. Then I went back to the sod-house, and wondered where they would find him, and how. Ah! that is the thought—when we know some one is astray in the Desert—that grips one's throat, making it hard for them to swallow. It is as though one's mouth was parched, and without moisture; and as though one had been long without water to drink. Strange, is it not? that our fears for another should in that way hold the prophecy of what is to come to them.

After an hour or two of restless wandering about the place, I, too, went down the road that led to the Desert. I wanted to sight, if I could, the coming of the men. Then—less than a hundred yards down the cañon—I came upon them. They were bringing Old Man Berry.

Alive. And quite determined to go back, just as

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soon as he could arrange with some one for another wagon. Pluck to the last!

When he found his horses had gone, he started back on foot after them, thinking to find them but a short distance away. Following their tracks, for twenty-five miles he went up and down gullies—weary and faint for want of food; over sun-baked alkali flats where the warped mud-crust had dried in up-curled flakes like feathers blown forward on the back of some wind-buffeted fowl—(it showed where water had been); along foothills where he stumbled and fell, while the sharp stones cut into and bruised his flesh; through the burning sand where the sun seethed and bubbled in his brain, and he wondered if he was going mad.

It was the old story of the earth in those places where it is far between water-holes. He fought with Death in the Desert. Fought, and won!

The cowboys, after the fashion of their kind, cursed him roundly (but with a ring of tender feeling for the old man in every word they said), and they called him many kinds of an old fool for getting lost. All of which he took in the spirit in which it was meant. Yet more than one of them had wet eyes as he tried to talk to them with thickened tongue that was still black between his lips; and we saw that his palms—which he tried to hide from us—were all bruised and blood-stained from sharp stones where he had fallen.

He was pluck itself—yes, sheer grit; for he fought his way through to victory over age, and infirmities, and Death. Yet, the end is not yet. Some day—there on the sun-bleached levels—they will find him—Old Man Berry—when the Desert has taken its toll.

THE LOVERS OF THE DESERT.

FOR all the toll the Desert takes of a man it gives its compensation in deep breaths, deep sleep, and the communion of stars. It comes upon one with new force in the pauses of the night that the Chaldeans were a Desert-bred people. It is hard to escape the sense of mastery as the stars move in the wide, clear heavens to risings and settings unobscured. They look large, and near, and palpitant; as if they moved on some stately service not needful to declare. Wheeling to their stations in the sky, they make the poor world-fret of no account. Of no account you who lie out there watching, nor the lean coyote that stands off in the scrub from you and howls and howls."

And she who wrote the words knows. She speaks from the heart that understands, because it voices the language of love for the vast, gray, silent mystery that means so little to those who flit by in a day and night of car travel, and then talk about "how lovely" the Desert is, and how "it appeals" to them. And to those I would say that the real Desert, and all its grave meaning, is farther away from them than it is from those who say nothing except that they do not know the Desert, and do not care anything about it. The Desert does not need such lovers. Its voice will never speak

The Lovers of the Desert.

to those who call it either "artistic" or "restful." Yet there are many such—good folk, too; but they are those who use, for the decorations of their "cosy corners," Indian baskets and Indian blankets that they buy at the stores—and most of them made by white men or women. The Indian—his work and wares—have been the fashion for a little day among those who set the styles for the ornamentation or disfigurement of our homes; but I fear me his devotees (those who are devoted to him in this special way) are feeling that he is getting to be just a little bit—just a trifle passee. And they are already beginning to look about for another to take his place. There is just the shadow of a sign that they will choose the Desert. Suppose it should be? We who reverence and love the gray land, can only hope, with a hope that is half a prayer, that they will pass it by. Yet——If this thing should happen! What could we do—the Desert and I—to prevent it? The Desert and its lovers are helpless against vandals.

If you love the Desert, and live in it, and lie awake at night under its low-hanging stars, you know you are a part of the pulse-beat of the universe, and you feel the swing of the spheres through space, and you hear through the silence the voice of God speaking.

Then you will come to know that no better thing is in the world for man than just this—the close-touching of great things; the un-desire of the small, such as the man-crowded places give you; and just enough food and clothing and shelter to support life, and enough work to fill one's days.

Now, all this belongs to the old men of the Desert—the prospectors who have made the Desert their own.

So you do not know, neither do I dare say, how much of the joy of life these old prospectors find in following the mirage of a mine that leads them away to life's

end with empty palms, till at last they lie down in the alkali wastes to be one with the great silence of the plains. If it gives them much of joy to deny themselves all that you would deem vital, as they live out the measure of their days, dare you give them of your unasked pity? Perhaps they know more of the joy of life than you, in all the devious ways your quest for happiness has led you, have ever found.

The Lovers of the Desert.

Sometime, your destiny may lead you there; and lying in your blankets some night under a purple-black sky that is crowded with palpitating stars, while the warm Desert-wind blows softly over you—caressing your face and smoothing your hair as no human hands ever could—and bringing with it the hushed night-sounds that only the Desert knows; then—all alone there with only God and the Desert—you will come at last to understand the old prospector and his ways. But not now; not till you and the Desert are lovers.

FORMAN'S FIND.

Forman's Find

OPEN Fremont's journal; turn to the entry he made on New Year's day, 1844, and here is what you will read:

"We continued down the valley between a dry-looking, black ridge on the left, and a more snowy and high one on the right. Our road was bad along the bottom by being broken by gullies and impeded by sage, and sandy on the hills, where there is not a blade of grass; nor does any appear on the mountains. The soil in many places consists of a fine, powdery sand covered with saline afflorescence, and the general character of the country is desert. During the day we directed our course toward a black cape at the foot of which a column of smoke indicated hot springs."

And so it was, that the great Pathfinder—journeying west through the unknown, eerie land, vast and sand-strewn—on that first day of a year now more than half a century dead, came to know that certain part of Nevada where rises a great, gaunt promontory, its bold front to the Desert, grand in its gruesome barrenness, that afterward came to be such a well-known landmark. Seemingly devoid of every vestige of animal or plant life, it stands there defiant of any softening touch of nature. Down where steam clouds from the hot springs show white like sea spume, the moun-

tain's base is lapped by little hills that make creamy ripples against the other's black ruggedness.

Forman's Find

On the following day after the entry just quoted, Fremont's journal bore these words: "At noon . . . . we reached the hot springs of which we had seen the vapor the day before. There was a large field of the salt grass here, usual to such places. The country otherwise is a perfect barren, without a blade of grass. . . . . We passed around the rocky cape, a jagged broken point, bare and torn. The rocks are volcanic, and the hills here have a burned appearance—cinders and coal occasionally appearing as in a blacksmith's forge. We crossed the large dry bed of a muddy lake in a south-easterly direction and encamped for the night, without water and without grass, among sage bushes covered with snow. The heavy road made several mules give out today; and a horse —which had made the journey from the States successfully—was left on the trail."

On the sixth day of January Fremont tells of ascending a mountain "in the south-west corner of a basin communicating with that in which we encamped, and saw a lofty column of smoke ten miles distant, indicating the presence of hot springs."

In describing them, further on he says: "This is the most extraordinary locality of hot springs we have met during the journey."

After the Pathfinder, came others; and the way grew worn with many hoofs and wheels that moved westward. As the road became traveled, the places gained names; the "black cape" became Black Rock, and the twin hot springs at its point were known as Double Hot Springs, while the great cauldron of hot water across the valley bore the name of Granite Creek Hot Springs. Fremont gives the location of these latter

Forman's Find

as being in latitude forty degrees, thirty-nine minutes, forty-six seconds. His second day's camp from Black Rock was made in latitude forty degrees, forty-eight minutes, fifteen seconds. But one must remember that on January second and third his journeys were, each of them, short, as one day they traveled but eight miles, and on the other did not start out till afternoon—he having waited for the fog to lift.

These are the things we know. So much for Truth. Now to the Legend—if Legend it be.

If you go out these days into the Black Rock country, you will find dozens of camp-fire story-tellers who will relate it to you just as they did to me; and no one will vary in the telling—not in the slightest detail—from the way scores of others tell it.

One night, of the year eighteen hundred and fifty-two, an emigrant party crossing the plains camped at the foot of the mountain due west of, and in the next range from the one since known as Hardin Mountain. Being out of fresh meat, two or three of the men were chosen, as was the custom among emigrant parties, to go out afoot and hunt along the higher parts of the mountain for game. One of these men was named John Forman.

The following morning, Forman and two of his companions started out early after antelope, deer, mountain sheep, or such smaller game as they could find—going up the mountain at whose base they had made their camp, which was just across the valley from the point of Black Rock. Game being scarce on that side of the ridge, they ascended to the mountain top, intending to cross over to the farther side. On reaching the summit, where they could look down on the plain beyond, they saw what they thought to be smoke from Indian-made fires. Such were generally the signal fires

of the hostiles, so the white men kept well away from points where their movements would attract attention. But they did not cease their search for game, while bearing up from the foothills, and working their way along on the side of the mountain.

Forman's Find

Forman had dropped behind the others, and was considerably higher on the slope, when he stepped on some metallic substance that at once attracted his attention. It was entirely unlike anything else he had seen in that volcanic district—especially so in the top of this mountain of ashes and cinders, gray pumice and black lava. It protruded from the ground in a slab five or six feet in length, and was twelve or fourteen inches wide, at the lower end it stood at least sixteen inches out of the ground. Its surface was as though at some remote time it had passed through some extraordinary heat—as if it had been melted in the fires of a great furnace.

Forman hallooed to the others, who came back and examined it with him. It was not at all like any metallic stuff such as any of the three had ever seen. No one could guess what it might be; though Forman himself was half inclined to declare it melted silver. With their hunting knives they cut off bits of the metal which they carried away with them in their pockets as they continued their quest for game; for, though it might mean a fortune for each of them, meat was of more immediate importance to them all than a mountain range of solid silver, or even gold. So the hunters went on, climbing the mountain and clambering over the rocks; then, as the afternoon wore away, getting a better sight across the valley, they discovered that what they supposed to be Indian signal fires, was but the rising vapor from distant hot springs; springs that Forman—long afterward—came to know as Granite Creek Hot

Forman's Find

Springs. They found no game on the barren heights, so went down to the valley again, and joined the rest of their party that night at Mud Meadows where camp had been made.

Some days after, during idle hours in camp, finding that the metal would melt when subjected to extreme heat, Forman took the bits he had cut from the great metal slabs found on the mountain, and molded them into bullets. What the metal was, he had not yet determined; but other members of the party had fully convinced him that—whatever it might be—it certainly was not silver.

Going down Pit river, in an encounter with hostile Indians, Forman found use for the bullets. He shot them all away.

In the varied excitement and interests incident to life in a strange and newly-settled country, he soon—in California—completely forgot the matter, until it was recalled to him later when he was shown some specimens of pure lead. Satisfying himself that it was identical with the mineral he had discovered five or six years before, he saw the gleam of fortune brightening those far off plains for him. His decision was formed at once. He would forsake the gold-seeking that had, thus far, but ill repaid him; he would return to the mountains where he had every reason to believe were tons of lead to be had with but little expenditure of labor or money.

He confided in no one. If it should prove, when he investigated it, to be after all some worthless metal (which he did not for one moment believe), there would be none but himself the loser, or to laugh at the misplaced faith. On the other hand, if a fortune was there awaiting the finder, then it would be all his own.

During the months that intervened before he could

Forman's Find

arrange his trip, he became acquainted with a Missourian, who told him of a supposed lead mine away back on the desert, that was seen by one of Fremont's party in 1844. The discoverer had never thought it worth his while to return to it (he was too little impressed with it to know its real value); but he told the Missourian the latitude of the place they had encamped the night before ascending the mountain where he saw a huge, protruding slab of the metal. He also drew a rough map of the surrounding country. It was in latitude forty degrees, forty-eight minutes, fifteen seconds, he said; and across the valley rose a column of steam from immense hot springs, that looked—as one gazed down on it from the crest of the mountain, like the signal fire of hostile Indians. Forman listened with keen interest, thinking of his own discovery, and which he believed to be the same. The Missourian added that he intended going there in the following spring.

Forman kept his knowledge of the great lead mine to himself; but after hearing the Missourian's tale, his anxiety to go back to the Desert increased. He hastened his preparations, and early in 1859 he was back at the spot where he and his companions had encamped seven years before. He was back at the foot of the mountain that lies westerly from Hardin mountain, and in the very next range. Everything seemed familiar—he recognized every well remembered landmark. He was sure of success.

By the roadside, when arranging his own camp for the night, he noted that some one had camped there but a short time before—perhaps the previous day—as ashes and footprints showed. Early morning found him clambering over the mountain, stumbling over lava rock, or floundering through cinder and ash, as

Forman's Find

he directed his course to the farther side. At last he gained the summit, all out of breath and eager, and looked down again upon the "Indian signal fire" rising across the plain. But he saw something more—something he was unprepared for. He was not alone.

Just below him, where he knew the treasure lay, was the Missourian, going back and forth, up and down, over the ground as though seeking that which he was not able to find. Presently he looked up and saw Forman. Forman went down to him, and the result was the inevitable.

Each man accused the other of trespass, and hinted at treachery. Each of the men—friends before—eyed the other with suspicion. Then, covertly, they began looking for the slab of metal, each feeling himself handicapped in the search by the presence of the other, with whom he determined there should be no division of the treasure. So Forman and the Missourian alike carried on the search surreptitiously—or tried to—but, with another striving for the same possession, the quest was a failure. At last they departed from the place together; neither daring to trust the other there after he should himself be gone.

The next year the search was renewed by both men, but at different times; and renewed again and again in the aftertime. But after that first meeting on the mountain, they never chanced to encounter one another there; which was perhaps fortunate, for their animosity toward each other grew with the years.

Neither of them ever found the slab of pure lead that stood for a mine—or which to them represented a mountain that might well be, for all they knew, of solid lead, and might form the bulk of the mountain. Prospecting year after year, neither of them ever came upon any sign that spoke of lead in any form or any

quantity. It seemed strange that neither of them, after so many years of searching should fail in their quest; for both claimed such accurate knowledge of the exact locality. Yet—if you will but think of it in so favorable light—the reason is not hard to find. Only you must not be of a sceptical turn of mind. It is this: The Missourian was forever declaring that Forman had covered it up to keep him from finding it.

Forman's Find

And Forman always said the same of the Missourian.

THE LESSONS OF THE DESERT.

The Lessons of the Desert.

JUST a little flour, a piece of bacon, a handful of coffee, one's blankets, enough clothing for comfort—that is all. When one stops to think of it, it is astonishing to find how little one really needs, to live. It is only after you have been on a rough trip of weeks, when it was needful that you should debate well and long over not every pound, but literally every ounce of extra weight that you were to carry—casting aside all things but those that were vital to your absolute needs—that you came to realize how much useless stuff one goes through life a-burdened with.

I have a friend—an Indian—who tells me he would be more apt to think the White Man a great man, were he not forced to see he is a fool—for doing fool things. "Heap big fool," he says. He says that the White Man voluntarily strives for the acquisition of such things as bring but added care into one's measure of days; which is fool's work. Then he says; that to breathe full and strong, and to have a straight back, and carry the head high, one must not bear a load. And that to have long years of peace, and to live gladly, one must not do the things that "make worry."

So he asks me why the White Man (who thinks himself wise because of his different color) should—of

his own free will—make of himself a burden-bearer; and so be less wise (in the eyes of the Brown Man) than his Indian brother, whom he—in his heart—calls a fool? But I have been unable to make answer to that; because I, too, have also asked myself: "Why, indeed!"

The Lessons of the Desert.

Now, the least of us know that the possession of one thing calls for the immediate acquirement of some other thing to supplement it. And then, to that one, must be added another to answer the new demands the latter creates. And the third calls even more insistently for a fourth; and so on—forever and forever—the last one calling for still another, if we are of those fools who listen to the cry of their folly for more, and yet more.

And, if we only found satisfaction in the pampering and pleasing of the tastes and desires we encourage! But we don't. So that the Indian has license to laugh at our ways, when we ourselves can give no rational excuse for what we are doing, and keep doing. We burden ourselves with things that we buy, with no other excuse for the act than——"They are the things other folk have!" So we go on getting and getting, whether we want them or no. Very like sheep that follow the sheep with the bell, are we.

And I wonder if he who follows the bell-wether is any wiser than that one who trails after the story of a will-o'-wisp mine that leads him across Desert valleys and rough mountain ridges where there is never a sign of gold? Which is the fool; and which is the wise man? And who has the right to judge?

You may jeer and deride as you will, but the old prospectors do not care. They go their ways, letting you alone; and they ask, in return, that you let them

The Lessons of the Desert.

alone also. They will give you help if you need it; but they will ask nothing from you.

Their needs are so few that they want but little to live; and that they can earn. They have little; but they can earn a little by work. So it happens that those who know them may give—now and then—of their own stores, asking no toll for what they may do. Yet the kindness does not go unpaid. For, you must remember that these live in the Desert; and the Desert teaches one how to forget self. The help that an extra pair of hands can give to those who live in the far places where men do not congregate, is much; and for what is done for a comrade there, one gets payment in labor that is done with a willing hand—not because payment is exacted or expected, but because there is that in the blood of those who live there, that teaches them to be grateful.

It is only in those places where human life is hived in houses that touch elbows, so close are they huddled together, that one holds out one's hand for the final dimes and nickels in the payment of debts; or for the ultimate and absolute settlement of each and every obligation incurred. True, when you have become one with them that live there, you, too, fall into their ways; yet it is a good thing to remember that there are places —lonely and far though they be—where one may find those who have souls that are not shrivelled and dry; wrinkled and weather-worn men who are great of heart, and who would give half of their little all to you in your need, and with never a thought that payment was due.

So, in this way, and because of the fellowship there, the mirage-miners manage to live—to buy the few things that even a simple life makes needful.

A little flour, a piece of bacon, a handful of coffee,

your blankets, and such clothing as the season calls you to wear.

The Lessons of the Desert.

Then to live in the big, still plains that inspire a big, serene life, learning the best the Desert can teach you —these things, namely:

That we are what we think and feel, not what others think and feel us to be; and that in such wise does God surely judge us. That mankind is a brotherhood, each needing the other, and that not one can be spared from the unit; brothers are we, born of a common parentage, and you shall know there is small difference between man and man, except in so far as they are good or bad —not as the veneer of environment makes them. That we shall be more censorious of our own faults—less critical of the failings or follies of others.

To feel that the best life is the simple life; and, if one can, to live it out in such a companionship somewhere that you may have the great stretches of earth as God gives; to read—as from printed pages—in the grains of the far-reaching sand; to listen to a speech that is voiced by the stars and the four winds.

All these belong to the men who live there; so that it is hardly worth while to try to make the old prospectors give up their quests and go back to the places where people live. Even if the fairy stories of the fabulous mines were true, and they should, some day, find each his own treasure, I doubt if the end of the search would bring joy. To have money in the Desert, makes little change in one's ways of living. And to go back to cities——! They are alien to all the cities could give. So, the joy of life, for them, lies in the search for—not in the finding of gold.

THE MARVELOUS HARDIN SILVER.

The Marvelous Hardin Silver

SINCE that far time when Fremont found himself under the lee of Black Rock, one gloomy New Year's day, the sullen and bare promontory has been guide and landmark to thousands of voyagers crossing the great American Sahara. Westward more than half a hundred miles from the Central Pacific Railroad's traveled ways that go through Humboldt County, Nevada, lies Quin River Desert—forbidding and grim—and Black Rock rises abruptly from its levels. It is a dark and unfriendly looking point, with all the gruesomeness Fremont describes; but through all the years the emigrant wound his way toward the State that sees the setting sun sink downward to touch salt water, it has been his unfailing friend. For once seen, there is no mistaking Black Rock for any other landmark ever described, and to the wayfarer across the vast, lonely land, it was compass and star. The range of mountains from which it juts is of gnarled and misshapen masses of lava rock mixed with miles of ashes. About, are vast stretches of alkali plain, of whitened hummocks of hardened earth, of wide reaches of sand flats swept into waves by the wind.

It is all fierce, hard and repellant. Farther away the mountains bear rocks that burst into color, and their

broken and rainbow-hued bits besprinkle the "washes" in the foothills. Their graveled floors are thick strewn with variegated flakes of beauty—dark blue and light blue, purple and pink; a green that is like to emeralds, and ruby and amber in all their beauty of clarity and coloring. And where these jasper fragments are not, are burned and black volcanic boulders; and then you will come across places thickly strewn with fragments of vivid red rock—rock that is red as if blood-stained; and you say to yourself: "Why this is the waste and refuse from nature's great brick-yards!" so like unto that artificial building material does it seem.

The Marvelous Hardin Silver

All through this weird and wonderful valley, where white plumes of steaming springs wave here and there along the foothills, are things to hold your curious attention—acres of obsidian, others of petrified wood; turquoise, geodes, onyx, and a thousand other things beneath your horse's crunching hoofs, to make the riding of this range well worth your while.

Away back in 1849 a long train of emigrant wagons, fourteen in number, was crossing the plains on its journey to the West. Following the Humboldt river down the valley of the same name, at the Lassen Meadows they found so little feed for their stock, where the stock of the emigrant usually grazed for a day or so, that the travelers decided upon abandoning that route and, instead, crossing over toward Black Rock, and following the old Lassen road into California. But at Black Rock, also, they found but scant feed when they arrived. So they pushed on six miles farther to make camp, and rest, at those water demons called Double Hot Springs. About that steaming twin venthole of the old Earth's anger was always to be found grass green and growing—grass moist with steam-pearls, and of the tender hue of hot-house plants. Go there

The Marvelous Hardin Silver

when you will, you will find such sweetly fresh vegetation—sparkling with the ever-moist breath of the springs—that you leave it with regret to take up your journey again through the baked plain with its leprous-like spots of alkali.

At Double Hot Springs they made a temporary camp to give the stock the opportunity to rest and recover from the journey thus far passed. Brown men with bow in hand, and the soft tread of a wildcat, were all about the emigrant in those days; but at the springs there was no shelter under which an Indian could creep upon them, so they made a halt of a number of days there.

Their next move was to Mud Meadows, around on the farther side of the range.

Now it so happened that on the day they broke camp there, three of the party were deputized to hunt along the mountain ridge for game to replenish the well-nigh depleted larders of the camp-wagons. It was their custom to have two or three hunters—each "crew" taking its turn—go out, when the meat supply was low, to kill such game as the country afforded. These three were directed to hunt along the mountain tops, while the wagons worked their way up the valley's edge to Mud Meadows where, later, they would all meet.

One of the three hunters selected for that occasion was a man named Hardin, a wheelwright and blacksmith by trade. He was an uncle of J. A. Hardin, of Petaluma, California, a well-known cattle man of that State and Nevada.

The hunters were to cross a near-lying mountain, and then go over to the farther side to join the wagons. In leaving their camp at Double Hot Springs they crossed, first, a piece of tableland, and then made their way to the higher parts of the mountain. No game

The Marvelous Hardin Silver

was seen. Keeping along the east side of the mountain for some distance, they finally worked their way upward to the summit, from whence they had an unobstructed view of the valley.

Then they discovered they had lost their bearings, for no sign of the wagons was to be seen. They were about to descend to the plain to find (where the wagons had passed) the wheel-tracks, and so follow them into camp, when they espied, away down the Desert, a team that had stopped on the road. The three hunters—glad in this lonely land, to find a fellow voyager—at once started down the mountain side, heading directly for the halted wagon below.

They had gone, perhaps, a third of the way when of a sudden they found themselves floundering through a soft, gray deposit like sifted ashes, in which at every step they sunk ankle-deep. And here in the powdery stuff, was embedded something which shone so brightly in the sun that their gaze was arrested, and the far-away team, for the time, forgotten. One of the trio had, years before, been in the Mexican War, and after receiving his discharge had been employed on the pack-trains of the famous Potosi mine for some time before leaving that country. He instantly recognized the great slabs of whitish metal as melted silver—and perfectly pure, so far as he could judge. It looked as though the awful fires that had scattered the lava rock over the land and burned and blackened the face of the country in some places—or blanched it in others in the blaze of flames we wot not of—had run the metal white-hot through the ashes that covered that side of the mountain for several hundred square feet. Everywhere it was sticking up—pieces protruding that were the size of bricks—others in uneven masses of four or five feet long.

The Marvelous Hardin Silver

One is slow to realize good fortune, and they could but vaguely comprehend the meaning of what they saw. Then gathering up all they could carry, they started down the mountain to the place on the plain where they could still see the wagon stopping by the way. Arriving there they found an emigrant and his wife and child, who had been overtaken by disaster, for their oxen—all but one yoke—were dead, and there were yet many miles to travel ere they could reach California. The man was engaged in trying to remodel his wagon to fit the circumstances of his misfortune. He was cutting down his wagon from a four-wheeler to a cart, that the remaining yoke of weak, half-famished cattle might be able to draw it, loaded with their most important belongings, the rest of the journey, on and into the Land of Gold.

The excited Hardin showed them his find, and told them of the uncountable wealth they had discovered; and then asked the emigrant to take as many of their precious slabs into California as his wagon (after being cut down) would carry. But in vain did he and his companions plead. Not even the promise that he should share equally with the others had any effect on the man who kept busy with hammer and saw. They poured out their glowing wonder-tale, but he remained unmoved.

"Silver!" he exclaimed, at last, straightening himself from his work. "Maybe 'tis, and maybe 'tisn't. But I wouldn't do what you ask, even if it was solid gold! If I can get through to California with my little family alive, and with such things as we must have, it will be all that I can do. I've got to leave the bulk of my belongings here on the road, because I can't carry them in a cut-down wagon. No, Friends, you'll

get no help from me; for all the silver in the world wouldn't help me in my present predicament."

The Marvelous Hardin Silver

Finding all importunities of no avail, they threw the largest piece—the one Hardin himself had been carrying—down by the roadside. The remainder was then divided among the three and they started for Mud Meadows, where they arrived long after dark. There they showed their marvelous "find"; and the stir the shining stuff made, as it was passed from hand to hand, was excuse for the wild rejoicing of the two hundred emigrants, which was continued by the camp fire, more or less, all night. There was cause enough for rejoicing; for Hardin had declared there was enough of that silver in sight to load all fourteen of the wagons. So one and all declared that so soon as they could properly equip themselves for a return trip and the transportation of the silver, they would come back into this Desert-land of treasure that seemed beyond the most extravagant of dreams.

The following morning they left Mud Meadows, resuming their journey toward the West. Whether by accident or not, no one can say, but some pieces of the silver were left where they had camped that night, and were found later by others making camp there.

The emigrants found no further signs of silver or of other metals, and finally reached California, where the story of Hardin's find spread, as the emigrants repeated the tale. The three men, however, kept the secret of the exact locality where they had found this marvelous deposit. They were impatient to return at once, but the growing depredations of hostile Indians, as well as other affairs, deterred them. As soon as all arrangements could be made, and traveling in that land of the murderous arrow was safe, they would go; but

The Marvelous Hardin Silver

it was many a month thereafter before they could put their plans into execution.

Among those who, on that memorable trip into the West, had seen the marvelous silver, was Steve Bass—so well known the West through—and his brother. They had seen it, handled it and had heard Hardin tell the tale over and over again. And Bass himself often told how he had seen Hardin melt some of the bits into silver buttons. Taking an axe handle—it being of hard wood that would not ignite easily—Hardin hollowed a little place in the side of it, and laid therein bits of the silver which he had previously cut from the larger pieces of the metal, with his pocket knife. He then covered these over with live coals, and by blowing steadily on them for some time, the silver was melted into a button—one that he carried in his pocket for years afterward. And subsequently, when telling the tale of the fabulous find to a collector of minerals and curiosities, he showed him this button. Interested in its history, the man bought it of Hardin and took it to England, where, no doubt, it is now in some collection of minerals and curios, on the shelves of an Englishman's cabinet.

Hardin settled in Petaluma and opened a wagon shop, doing blacksmithing and such work. Men congregated there in the early days to "swap" mining stories; and one day when some one began talking to Hardin of his discovery away back on the plains, a new-comer—a man named A. B. Jennison, who had just come in from Rogue River, to settle in the valley—exclaimed:

"Why, I've heard that same story told by another man—one of the three who found it. I knew him well. But he declares that he's found since he got to California that other men know of gold in quantities as

great as was the deposit of that silver, and that he is going to look here for gold, instead of going back there to get a less valuable mineral—and perhaps be butchered by the Indians, in the bargain."

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Hostilities were increasing back on the emigrant roads where the brown man watched for the wayfarer from his hiding-place in the rocks, and the Desert country had no great attraction for miners who believed in like fortunes being found farther toward the West, and in more settled districts. But there were those whom the Hardin Silver lured, and of these was a doctor who had come to his knowledge of it through another source.

In 1859 this doctor came into the Honey Lake country, and took up his home in the lower end of the valley. He was a silent, uncommunicative sort of a man, and had no confidants. In those troublous times there were many desperate characters about, in that locality. If a man knew aught of any valuable possession—whether of something material or only a secret knowledge of things—he was very careful in his selection of those in whom he reposed confidence.

The doctor had no doubt of being able, some time, to trace his way back to a place on the plains where he had once seen something, the value of which he had not known till long afterward. The years went by, and he said nothing of it to any man. He was certain of a treasure-house there in the Desert; and the time would come when he would be able to go a-search for it, tucked away somewhere in the mountains. He could wait.

It was in 1852, when crossing the Desert near Mud Meadows, just after Hardin's party had passed through, that the doctor had found lying by the roadside where Hardin had dropped it, the larger piece of silver that the emigrant had refused to carry for him—that lone emigrant whom Hardin had left cutting down his

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wagon. At the time of finding it, the doctor had failed to recognize its value, and so had left it there. But—many months afterward—he came to know that it had been pure silver that he had held in his hands. Others who camped there later, and were questioned about it, knew nothing of any such thing being there; so that it is not known who took it away from the place where it lay in plain sight. Probably it was picked up by some one who knew as little of its value as did the doctor. Or it might have been some one who did indeed know its value, and to this day is seeking the place from whence it came—as so many other prospectors have done, and are still doing.

The doctor finally laid plans for the return trip to this spot where he so well remembered having seen the melted silver; but the very month set for his start found him sick—sick unto death. When he realized that recovery was impossible, he called two of his friends to him, and there on his death bed told Tommy Harvey and George Lathrop all he knew of it, and of the locality where it could, no doubt, be found. Even to the minutest particulars he described that place in Desertland where he had held in his hand what he believed to be the key to a treasure-house of uncounted wealth.

"If I could only have lived long enough to go there, myself," he said. "If it had only been safe for a man to go there at any time since I saw that country, I know I should have found the ledge itself—I know from what I have heard Hardin and others tell, that I could have gone directly to it."

So the doctor died—one of the many who believed in the mirage-mine—if it be but a mirage-mine, yet who knows?—and the two who went found nothing. The mountains were so many, and so bewildering.

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Nor was the doctor the only one who, in crossing the plains, found evidence of the truth of Hardin's story, there where the old camping ground had been. One party of emigrants, in particular, made their camp near Mud Meadows, in the spring of 1852; and there they, too, found some of the smaller pieces of silver that Hardin and his companions had dropped. They gathered together all they could find, though it was but a small amount, and took it to the town of Shasta with them. There, it was bought by a jeweler by the name of Lewin, who paid for it by giving in exchange its weight in Mexican dollars. He displayed it in the window of his jewelry store; and there it was seen by scores of people—among them such men as L. D. Vary, Governor Roop, and others whose word was relied upon as of those who "speak of a verity," and who have many a time since told of having seen the Hardin Silver with their own eyes. It attracted much attention by reason of its romantic history, until the store was burned. Yet, in raking over the ashes when they had cooled, Lewin found it there—a melted mass of smoke-blackened metal.

Hardin dreaded (as who did not dread in those days when the Indian held the Desert?) to undertake the hardships and perils of a trip, even though it held out such glorious promise of fortune quickly made. People who crossed the plains in the old days were not eager to retrace their steps immediately, or to repeat their experiences. Hardin felt, too, that the treasure was safe though he might not go to it at once. But, finally—in 1858—he determined to hazard Indians and like evils, and to retrace his way to where in ashes and lava lay those great blocks of silver—no one knew how many, no one could guess.

On this trip he took with him, as a precaution

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against any surprises from Indians, two men, one of whom was named Alberding. When, at length, they arrived at Double Hot Springs, Hardin looked ahead and saw Black Rock point—the monument he so well remembered—that was the landmark of the wondrous slabs of silver. Pointing to it, he said to his companions:

"Look ahead, boys! Do you see that spring on the hillside?" (It was afterward named "Ram's Horn Spring" by the later emigrants, and is known by that name today.) "Do you see the cañon that lies below it? I'll tell you this, now; I didn't find the silver below that place; nor did I find it more than half a mile above; and it is somewhere there at the left."

They all went to the spot he had indicated. They searched and searched. Up and down, back and forth, and retracing their steps again and again, as they looked for the strange ash deposit. Of silver there was no sign. Even ash there was none. The face of the mountain seemed completely changed. Waterspouts and cloudbursts are of frequent occurrence in that country, and now there were deep gullies and cuts that had not been there before. The whole surface of the mountain had altered beyond recognition.

Avalanches of broken, sliding rock had been set moving downward by the restless elements, and what had been bare ground before was now hidden under tons of boulders and smaller bits of rock. Avalanches of water had bared rocks once covered with earth. Moving—shifting—changing with the years, nothing was now the same. No sign of silver was ever seen in that mountain again, either then or thereafter.

So, at last, Hardin and his companions went away. He knew the silver was there; but it was to be his—never.

Others came, after them, and the search went on.

OF CALIFORNIA

Several prospecting parties were there in 1859, and again in the '60's; and year after year, even down to our own day, do they go.

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There have been those (guided by a divining rod that showed them, they aver, the exact spot where the stream of molten metal flowed and cooled in its bed of ashes) who have put minted silver by the thousands into the mountain in tunnels, and shafts, and inclines driven and sunk in absolute faith in the hidden treasure of the heights. Silver a-plenty has been sunk, but none ever brought to light.

Every summer sees one or more wagons, carrying prospectors, crawling across the furnace-hot alkali levels that border the Black Rock land. The mirage of Quin River Desert dances about them, as the mirage of Hardin Mountain beckons them on.

And though they always return with empty palms, hope is never absent from them; and they will tell you that some one, some day, somewhere in that grim, still mountain that even the birds shun, will find the lost treasure vault the three men stumbled on that day in the long ago.

Perhaps. I do not know. Such is the story of the marvelous Hardin Silver—the story just as I heard it out by the foothills of the grim old mountain, and by the dry Desert-sea that creeps up to its feet. If you had heard it in that strange land you would not have marveled at the strangeness of the tale, but would have had the faith that the others have had, no matter how you might have doubted when—afterward—you had shaken off the mystery and charm of the Desert.

I give you the story just as I got it. Believe it or not, as you choose.

"I dare not say how true 't may be—
I tell the tale as 'twas told to me."

THE LURE OF THE DESERT.

The Lure of the Desert.

EXCEPT you are kindred with those who have speech with great spaces, and the Four Winds of the earth, and the infinite arch of God's sky, you shall not have understanding of the Desert's lure.

It is not the Desert's charm that calls one. What is it? I know not; only that there is a low, insistent voice calling—calling—calling. Not a loud voice. The Desert proclaiming itself, speaks gently. And we—every child of us who has laid on the breast of a mother while she rocked slowly, and hushed our fretting with a soft-sung lullaby song—we know how a low voice soothes and lulls one into sleep.

You are tired of the world's ways? Then, if you and the Desert have found each other, surely you will feel the drawing of your soul toward the eternal calm—the brooding peace that is there in the gray country.

Does the beautiful in Nature thrill you to your finger-tips? When your eye is so trained that it may discover the beauty that dwells in that vast, still corner of the world, and your ear is attuned to catch the music of the plains or the anthems sung in deep cañons by the winds; when your heart finds comradeship in the mountains and the great sand-seas, the sun and the stars, and the huge cloud-drifts that the Desert winds set a-rolling round the world—when all these reach

your heart by way of your eye and your ear, then you shall find one of the alluring ways that belongs to the Desert.

The Lure of the Desert.

Do you seek for the marvelous? Or do you go a-quest for riches? Or simply desire to wander away into little known rifts in the wilderness? By these lures and a hundred others will the Desert draw you there. And once there, unprejudiced, the voice by and by will make itself heard as it whispers at your ear. And when you can lay your head on its breast, and hear its heart-beats, you will know a rest that is absolute and infinite. Then, you will understand those who yearly go a-searching for the mythical mines of mirage-land, and those who have lived apart from others for a life-time, and are forgot by all their kindred and friends of a half-century ago. You will say: "It is the Desert's lure. I know—they cannot help it. And—yes!—it is worth all the penalty the gray land makes them pay!"

If you go to the Desert, and live there, you learn to love it. If you go away, you will never forget it for one instant in after life; it will be with you in memory forever and forever. And always will you hear the still voice that lures one, calling—and calling.

"The Desert calls to him who has once felt its strange attraction, calls and compels him to return, as the sea compels the sailor to forsake the land. He who has once felt its power can never free himself from the haunting charm of the Desert."

THE RISE AND FALL OF HARDIN CITY.

The Rise and Fall of Hardin City

WHITE as bleached bones and level as a coffin lid, Quin River Desert fills the miles and miles of space lying between the Antelope and Black Rock mountain ranges. A sea of alkali, the Desert winds set waves of drifting sand lapping the western shore, where Black Rock point itself (that famous landmark for all who have voyaged here, from Fremont down to the lonely prospector of today), juts promontory-wise into the great silence. So vast and level it is, that Quin River itself—a considerable stream after the spring thaw has sent the snow-fed creeks rushing down the river—is but a varnish of moisture, miles in width, on the surface of the great plain where sun and wind soon combine to rub it all away.

A sea without a sail, save those that—like mine own—have gone drifting over its desolation into that wonderful beyond; that weird world made of strange rock forms and lavish splendor of color that lies a hundred miles away from the railroad, undisturbed and almost unknown. A land of marvels, of wonder upon wonder, where you may ride for hours, never out of sight of petrified tree stumps that stand like grim ghosts of dead centuries; where you may ride for days among hills honey-combed with caves whose linings are beautiful frescoes of color, or freaks in their oddity of form;

where you may ride for weeks among springs—warm, hot, or furiously boiling—never finding one that runs cold water. And riding so, you will find life a good thing. That is, if you have the eyes that see and the heart that beats in brotherhood to vast silence and space, and the thousand and one alluring things that we may find anywhere on the far edges of civilization—and surely here, where the world is rich in rare surprises as it waits you under the wide-arching, steel-bright Nevada sky.

The Rise and Fall of Hardin City

So one day I beached my boat beyond the cliffs and rippled hills that cluster about the point of Black Rock; beyond those terrors, Double Hot Springs, whose wickedly boiling waters change their coloring—green as copperas, or blue as indigo—according as the light falls. Walking about their funnel-shaped rims, peering down into that inferno, you see the wheel-barrow that since the early '50's has balanced itself twenty feet under water on the edge of the shelf that is above a depth that is bottomless, and one falls to wondering what wayfarer on that great continental Desert-road brought it from out the far-away East to leave it here; and why.

Half a dozen miles beyond Double Hot Springs, stands—tall and alone—a chimney of squared, whitish stone blocks; sole relic of the buildings that once made Hardin City. About it the Desert is broken into hummocks of hard alkali ground that—being opened—yields the only fuel of the place. Hidden there are the roots of giant sagebrush long dead—roots that give no sign that sagebrush had ever thrived there till pick and shovel uncover them. That this particular spot was chosen for the townsite of Hardin City, was no doubt due to its plentiful, if peculiar, fuel supply.

Behind, are the Harlequin Hills—ribbed ridges of

The Rise and Fall of Hardin City

color, motley, and unreal in seeming. And here it was—just where, no man may say—in these hills that the famous Hardin Silver was found, and lost—the marvelous Hardin Silver that has since sent many a man half mad in his always fruitless quest. To this day there are those of great faith who yearly seek the mythical silver in those mountains of strange geological formations—so unlike any of their neighbor heights and hills. Many are the men who, since the stir it made in 1849, have been constantly searching; and not the least well known among them have been Ladue Vary and Leroy Arnold. Feeble, with palsied hands and frost-white hair, these two men stir one's pity by their useless faith.

It was years after the Hardin Silver excitement that there journeyed down from Idaho a miner named Frank Peed, bringing with him samples of ore from the famous Poor Man's mine—bits that had that soapy appearance peculiar to some rock from that district. These pieces he showed to two men, O'Donnell and Jennison, who at once declared it to be similar to, if not identical with, ore that they had once seen near Hardin Mountain; but which at the time had not impressed them as being valuable. Taking some three or four pounds of samples from the Poor Man's mine for comparison, they at once went into the Black Rock country. Soon they returned with a large quantity that seemed of the same character, and suggested the same values. An assay made by the assayer of the American Valley Smelter, gave a return of $117. Other tests under the direction of such men as Kingsbury, Bowman, and Major Smith of the fort at Smoke Creek gave uniform results.

Men were at once set at the task of taking out a large amount of ore; and work, buoyed by hope, went for-

ward with the mining, as the miner's mirage beckoned them on. An assayer of good repute was engaged to work exclusively for that mine at a monthly stipend of $250. He devoted himself to the work with a wholeheartedness most commendable. The results he got from his assays were fabulous. Also, the results were unquestioned by the mine owners.

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Encouraged by the assay returns, several tons of the ore were selected from that which had been taken out, for a working test, and one of the Thacker brothers undertook to haul it to Unionville, nearly—if not quite—a hundred miles away. It was worked at the John C. Fall mill at the mouth of Unionville cañon—the mill at the old Arizona mine that made Fall a several times millionaire, known all over the West—but Fall could not, for some inexplicable reason, cope with it. Nothing was obtained from the rock; and, as is usual in such cases, the mill received the full measure of censure and blame.

Disappointed, but not disbelieving, they determined upon another, if smaller, working test; so a man by the name of Giddings, with a thousand pounds or so, trudged with it into the Washoe country—to Dall's Mill. When the millmen there (experienced in the appraising of ores to the degree of being able almost to recognize values at sight) saw it, they at once declared the stuff to be worthless, and laughed at Giddings for bringing it all that great distance to be milled by them.

So, in pity for his delusion, they refused to work it. They declared it would be robbery on their part; and on his, time and money thrown away.

But Giddings was obdurate. He had faith in the rock; and he wanted it worked. And what faith so absolute, what belief so obstinate, as that of a man with a mine he believes in! At last the man who had charge

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of the mill—Hiskey—more to quiet Giddings than for any other reason, said they would take it; and having an entire distrust of there being any ore values whatever in the lot, agreed to make no charge for the milling should the result show any such values.

The rock was worked; the returns were—great! Hiskey proved himself a man of his word and made no charge for the milling.

Then the original owners of the mine, having taken others in with them to assist with capital in the construction of suitable works, began the erection of the mill and other necessary buildings. That was the founding of "Hardin City." Satisfied that they had "a big thing" at the foot of Hardin Mountain, they felt that the work was warranted. Major Bass, Judge Harvey, Larry Bass, Alvaro Evans and Chancellor Derby, as well as many others, had tests made time and time again, with the same uniform result. Perhaps eighty tons, as working tests, were milled by them—the net result being about $4,000 handed over to them in silver bullion. The more the tests, the greater were the returns. On an average, they ran higher than the average workings of the Comstock. Also, there was a greater amount of gold than the Comstock carried. It seemed in the face of such evidence that there was no good reason for disbelieving in the mine's genuine worth, and so the fame of the Desert's mining claim spread.

Soon a cluster of substantial adobe buildings were grouped around a mill modeled on precisely the style of Dall's—the one that had so successfully worked their second ore shipment. To reproduce as nearly as possible the mill they knew could, and did, work such ore as they had, was the thing to be done to ensure them unfailing results; so they secured the services of

the furnace man from Dall's, together with two other men that understood perfectly the working of that mill in all particulars. With every hope of success the owners looked anxiously forward to the clean-up of their first run.

The Rise and Fall of Hardin City

In the meantime a new assayer, Cheatham, had been engaged. The man's name was a misnomer, for he was honesty itself; and with the result of his first assay before them, came the first chill of fear, lest they had been over sanguine. The results obtained by Cheatham were not at all those got by his predecessor. The mine-owners began to look dubious, outsiders said things looked queer, and all awaited the start of the mill with the keenest of anxiety.

At last everything was complete—the ore was waiting, the machinery was set in motion, the stamps went to chunk-chunk-chunking the ore into powder. They were now to know the truth.

Several tons were run through. The result was—nothing!

Absolutely nothing! Not even a trace. Of metal of any sort, none! Not so small a particle as the point of a fine cambric needle did it yield.

Over and over again they tried. Always, the result was the same. The rock from Hardin Mountain was barren of ore values as a bit of Bath brick.

What was the explanation, then, of the bullion they had received from the run at Dall's Mill?

I, myself, can offer no explanation. I can only tell you what was told me. An old miner—Duffy, of Deer Creek—whose superstitions would put to the blush many a Southern mammy's faith in spooks and spirits, has solemnly averred to me that the mine had been placed under a spell by some evil spirit—changed by a

The Rise and Fall of Hardin City

genius of ill from rich rock into worthless. "Hoodooed," he said.

But when I repeated this to one who had, in days of old, known the men and the mine, he only smiled and said that an assayer receiving $250 per month would naturally want to "hold onto his job," and (unconsciously, of course) would be optimistic.

"But the bullion that was worked at Dall's Mill?" I queried.

"Comstock."

"I don't understand," I said, rather bewildered.

"They hadn't made a thorough clean-up of Dall's Mill after running those rich old Virginia ores through, before they took hold of this ore, and these fellows got about $4,000 in bullion that originally came up to the light of day from out of Comstock shafts."

Its buildings are quite dismantled and destroyed. The winds of the Desert—the rains of the years have nibbled and gnawed at the adobes until only the faintest traces that they once were, remain. Of the mill itself, part of the whitish-gray stone of its walls, and most of the tall chimney, stand out in sharp relief, discernable miles away against the darker background of Hardin Mountain.

Duffy told me the other day that now the mill is haunted.

THE MEN OF THE DESERT.

The Men of the Desert.

IN THE Pine Forest range, tucked away in a cañon that is hard for a stranger to find, is a little group of cabins where some of the oldest prospectors in the State have made their homes for this many a year. There, away from kindred—even civilization—they have lived for a third of a century, seeking for the gold they have never found. They have isolated themselves from the rest of the world for half a lifetime, and have lived a life of hardest toil in that land of which such wondrous stories are told of mines of fabulous worth. It savors of romance to read of men going there to seek their fortunes; but to endure the hardships such quests involve is quite a different matter.

Apart from the world, and by the world long forgot, these men are in reality path-finders—blazing the way for future generations.

So the quiet years go by, while they go on looking for fairy-gold—for the mines that are found only at the rainbow's end. Yet, fairy-gold though it be, still will they keep on seeking the Three Little Lakes of Gold, and Forman's Find, and the silver that Hardin saw, or the long lost Blue Bucket mines. They are not miners, after all—only prospectors; for they have never had a mine. They have, for all their busy years, found

The Men of the Desert.

nothing to be mined. So they are but prospectors, at most. Neither are they looking for mines. Only for a mine. Just one certain mine, that each one believes in—and each one has named as his. Only it is in dream-land still.

Some of these men have met starvation and thirst in the Desert, and have been down to the edge of things where Death claims his own—and have yet lived, coming back from the horror of it all, to tell of the hours of the Black Night, and to warn other men from the trail that leads that way. Some there are who have gone through battles of Indian warfare; and they will show you arrow-point scars, and those that came from slits in the flesh that were made by the "Redskins." That was when the State was a Territory; and they themselves were young. These men all have their stories to tell; and if you linger long in the land, you will find yourself often by their campfires, as the darkness falls on the foothills and they whittle from a square of tobacco that with which they crowd the bowls of their pipes. When a glowing greasewood coal is laid there, and the pipe is made to draw, you will hearken to things (as they tell them) worth crossing the world to hear.

But other men than miners live in this lava-land; and here have made homes. So small are the ranches, you scarcely call them by that name. You come upon them up on the heights where are found wee meadows wet by the mountains' melted snow, or the flow that comes down from hot springs. There men toil, and till the ground, and find life good. There one fills his lungs with air that is like wine in the blood, and his soul with the gladness of living. You will have to discover these places for yourself; for the roads that men

make in that country mostly run through the valleys, and these skyland ranches do not lie on your route.

The Men of the Desert.

As you go journeying away over these little used highways, you note that the country can be in no wise changed from that which men found as they voyaged through here in the years of long ago.

Railroad steel has been laid, and the wires have been strung on poles set away to the North, and far, far to the Southward; but here there is nothing to mark human life in the land, except the dim and dusty road that is but little more than a thread through the valley's expanse.

Desert stretches reach to far mountains. Beyond are still other barren plains; beyond these yet other lonely mountain ranges. And these keep repeating themselves over and over again as you go—as you travel farther and farther away to the North.

A picture of vastness. And—as you view it from afar—one with no detail; only the great sky-touching mountain ranges, the wide Desert—and over them the immensity of the ocean-blue of the heavens, lending the picture its only vivid coloring. But go up into the mountains, and there you find a wealth of tint and tone. Go up into the mountains, and you will there find the men that are good to know—the prospectors who came into the country in the days of their youth.

THREE LITTLE LAKES OF GOLD.

Three Little Lakes of Gold

DEEP-DOMED heavens—a wide-reaching Desert. Above, the sapphire blue of a summer sky without one cloud—below the nun-grey of a Nevada plain without a vestige of verdure. And (at the rim where they meet and blend) distant mountains, dim and uncertain in outline and coloring.

Here you are far, far beyond the locomotive's whistle or the moaning of the railroad telegraph wires, with the plaintive chords drawn from them by the plain's winds. You travel farther still into the North, across those level, lonely sand-wastes, going toward vague mountains wrapped in violet and blue shroudings, and so bring them out of their uncertainty, until you reach the first waves of foothills that lap their feet; then the mountains' misty outlines are dissipated, and they stand in all their mightiness before you—ruggedly magnificent and quite unlike anything you imagined them to be. For you find there hidden cañons holding groves of leafy shade, and beautiful streams, deliciously cold on the hottest of summer days.

Cross the mountain chain, and there will be another Desert like unto this you have but just passed over. Then (as breastworks on its farther side) there are other mountains so like these that you grow bewildered

in looking. Another wide plain, dry and deathly still; another great ridge, vague and uncertain.

Three Little Lakes of Gold

Half a century ago—in 1851—a little party of emigrants, with faces turned toward the West, moved slowly along here in their ox-teams, and one night camped at what is now known as Massacre Springs. It was away up toward the northward of the traveled ways across the continent—in the "High Rock country"—on the emigrant road that crosses the upper part of Humboldt county. On awakening the following morning, they found that Indians creeping to their camp while they slept, and leaving them undisturbed, had stolen all their cattle. What to do? How to reach California? Their oxen were gone. Without draft animals, to press on to the West was an impossibility. There was nothing to do but to follow the trail of the stolen steers, and—relying on the white man's superior weapons—recover their stock, if possible.

So all the men of the party—five in number—set out, leaving behind them the womenfolk and little children. The cattle were easily tracked, for during the night a light rain had fallen, and their footprints, as well as those of the Indians, were sharp cut in the mud.

The day was dark and gloomy; clouds obscured the sun, and a fog settled over the whole valley. At times a drizzling rain fell; but the men tramped doggedly on, following the hoof-prints marked deep in the moist earth. After many hours of walking, they realized that they were further away from camp than was prudent for white men in a hostile Indian country; inasmuch as the women and children were entirely unprotected during the time they might be away. They halted, and conferred together. It was decided that two of them should, at once, return to camp, while the remaining three were to follow the trail of the stolen

Three Little Lakes of Gold

cattle until they were sighted; and then, watching their opportunity, if possible get possession of the oxen again and get them back to camp. Without recovering them the emigrants were helpless in a hostile country, unless they should chance to be picked up by some other party of passing emigrants—a contingency so remote as to be scarcely worth considering.

So they parted; two of them going back to camp, and the others to whose lot it fell to follow the stolen cattle, keeping on the plainly marked trail leading southward. Finally, these three found themselves in a beautiful and well-watered cañon, green with grass and shrubbery. The rocky cliffs that closed it in rose to great heights on either side; and down between the narrow gorge's walls plunged a creek in a succession of foaming cascades. Near the entrance of the cañon it leaped—a sheer drop of seventy-five feet—over a ledge of projecting rock in a beautiful waterfall to a hollowed place in the solid rock bed of the creek beneath. Then, separating into three streams, the waters formed as many pools below.

It was at the foot of the waterfall the three men stopped, and stooped to the basin hollowed there nearest the fall to drink. In its clear depths, among water-worn pebbles and black sand, one of the men (who had previously seen something of the California placers) saw pieces of gold—not simply gold-dust, but nuggets. Huge nuggets of the pure metal. He showed them to his companions, to whom native gold was an unfamiliar sight. All three immediately fell a-searching for more, and were rewarded in a short time by finding enough to fill a tin quart-cup which one wore tied to his belt. Besides this, they filled their pockets—and one of the men put as many nuggets into his handkerchief as he could well manage.

Three Little Lakes of Gold

However, they feared the delay of hunting for gold might lose them their stock—which was infinitely more precious to them in their desperate condition than a mountain of gold—so realizing that each minute meant loss, as well as danger, to them, they reluctantly prepared to leave the spot that still lured them to stay. But men do not easily turn away from the sight of gold, no matter to whom it belongs; and this—uncounted wealth for all—was all their own. Theirs, for the simple task of taking. So, after filling the cup with the precious nuggets, and cacheing it at the foot of a tree (a dead pine that should serve as guide when they would come again) they yielded to the fascination of the gold's yellow shine, and turned again to the creek to gather, if possible, from one of the other wee lakes that had been less thoroughly searched, yet other bits of gold. They had scarcely clambered down the bank to the edge of the stream when a rain of lead came from the cliffs above them, and two of the three men fell—shot to death.

Indians had slipped softly upon them as they were searching in the gravel and sands; and the waterfall's roar had drowned any sound that otherwise might have warned them. Before the second volley of shots could come from those old-time, slow-loading guns, the remaining man had found opportunity to escape by darting quickly into the thick underbrush, and working his way carefully up the creek. Clever as the redskins were in following the trail of a white man, here was one who outwitted them by hiding among rocks that, in their search, they passed and repassed many times. Then slipping out, but keeping well under cover, he finally found himself in a large grove of aspens and cottonwoods. From there he made his way out of the cañon to the heights where he could see over the coun-

Three Little Lakes of Gold

try. Mountains, mostly rugged and bare, were all about him, rimming the wide and barren plains; but far away to the southward he discovered a single timbered range. Toward it he directed his course. He had lost his bearings in his flight, and could not guess now in which direction lay the camp. He argued, too, that no doubt hours before the redskins had come down upon him and his companions, they had found the unprotected women and children and massacred them. Nothing ever was heard of them, or of the two men who had returned to camp, so that they too doubtless met their death at the hands of the savages, unless they perished in the Desert in an attempt to continue their journey on foot.

When the one survivor, of whom we know aught, saw the wooded mountain across the valley, he turned his steps that way. He must get out of the Indian-infested country as best he could, without food or any human assistance. Ahead of him were terrible miles to be traversed, and the demon of thirst to be battled with. Where trees were, there he knew was water; and about those mountain springs was greater chance of finding things that were edible. He must reach the tree covered heights.

He—Stoddard—began his awful journey. He still carried the handkerchief with its burden of gold, having kept an unconscious grasp on it through all the perils of his escape. Over mountain ridges he climbed, over sun-baked plains he wearily walked. Days and days he journeyed. How many? where? in what measure of suffering?—neither he nor any other ever knew. For when, at length, he wandered into Downieville, in California, it was a shrivelled mummy that men saw stumbling along in shreds of ragged clothing, barefoot and bareheaded, half-famished and with mind wholly

gone. Delirious, he babbled of Indians, of eating roots and the berries of wild rose-bushes, of picking up nuggets of gold, of walking—walking—walking! He had a wild animal's fear of human faces—was hardly human himself. But still his bony fingers clutched a handkerchief, and in the handkerchief were the nuggets of gold.

Three Little Lakes of Gold

Of those who first saw Stoddard when he staggered into Downieville, was old Major Downie himself—he for whom the town was named. To many a listener afterwards he related how he himself had seen Stoddard still tightly gripping the handkerchief as he came into the town—delirious, in the likeness of a skeleton, yet with the miser's grasp on his treasure.

When after long weeks of careful nursing, reason returned to him, he began—little by little—to recall the events of days directly preceding that of his arrival at the cañon of the "three little lakes," as he called the pools where the gold was found. Some things rose quite clearly before his mind; others he groped for through a fog of dimmed recollection. Gradually he came to remember that about noon of the day preceding the one when his companions had been killed, they had passed out of High Rock cañon, and that night had camped at Massacre Springs. Then, later, memory was further cleared of the haze, and he told of the loss of the cattle, of the trail they had followed, of the finding of the nuggets, of the Indians' attack upon them, of his comrades' fall, and his own escape, and—lastly—of directing his course toward the far-away mountain of water and food as well as shelter—that mountain to the southward, fully forty miles away.

Again memory failed him. As to the fearful days that lay between the time when he dragged his wearied feet over the dry Desert levels—going mad with an intolerable thirst, and, with blood-shot eyes, always

Three Little Lakes of Gold

looking toward the far-off heights dark with juniper and mountain mahogany—and the time when he found himself fed and clothed and cared for by the people of Downieville, his mind was a complete blank.

As to the truth of his assertions regarding the three little lakes of gold—if you doubted, there was the handkerchief heavy with the metal; a very tangible proof that somewhere back in Northern Nevada at the foot of a high waterfall in a lovely cañon, where three small pools and in them was gold.

Then the gold hunt began. That was in the spring of '52; and not yet is the search ended—not yet are the searchers done. Still men go to the big, quiet country away off there where the railroad, and the telegraph, and the daily mail do not find them. They search, and search, and search. Even in this year of grace do men go to seek the hidden treasure casket of the mountain.

Travelling away out there, on pleasure bent, I have myself met them on the road; and (after the fashion of wayfarers in a great silent country where few go, albeit they who meet are strangers) we have greeted one another as we met on the road, and we drew rein to talk together a bit there in the stillness of the wide alkali plains. I have found them bright with hope, and buoyed by the belief that they surely, this time, would find reward for their years of patient search. And I have seen them again, long afterward, jaded and worn with weeks of fatiguing toilsome travel. Less buoyant they were, less bright; but still hopeful that some day they would come upon the cañon (that lies less than a day's foot-travel from Massacre Springs) where a mountain stream falls sheer to its rocky bed below; and the stream—dividing—fills three tiny pools, and in the pools are nuggets of gold.

They search and seek—they grow old and gray in

Three Little Lakes of Gold

the seeking, while the years slip softly by, as a gray coyote slips by one on the rabbit-trails that make a network of the gray earth there. Searching for what (we say) is not. Creeks they find in the cañons, that have divided and make three—four—a dozen little pools. But no waterfall plunges down the gorge from just above. The mountains have many beautiful waterfalls (if one but knows where to find them), but none that the old men have found sings to three little lakes down below. The sceptics (after their fashion) smile, but that does not hinder the faithful in their quest.

Dreamers? We declare them such. Yet suppose that some time one of their number should find the spot that Stoddard found back in the early 'fifties? What if one of the faithful should some day come back to tell us he has found, in a remote cañon away back on the plains, an old tin cup (so old and rusted that it broke apart as he lifted it), and that the cup was filled full to the brim with virgin gold? What then?

THE BEAUTY OF THE DESERT.

The Beauty of the Desert.

UNDER the palms and pepper-trees that grow by Pacific waters I sit, and say: "This is home"; saying it over and over again, as a child repeats the lesson that is hard to learn. But repeating the words of a lesson a hundred and more times is not learning it. And I do not know my lesson yet. I have driven my tent pegs here among California roses, and under a California sky. I have stretched the ropes tight, and have anchored them down—to stay. Yet this is not Home. If you would ask why, remember that the tent canvas was weathered in a Desert-wind, and the ropes bleached by a Desert-sun. Then, too, the tent stood there for long. Very long. And the tent pegs pull hard when driven long in one place. So—though there are roses and lilies about me, and the wind brings the salt smell of the sea—yet would I have the Desert-alkali in my nostrils and smell the smoke from a grease-wood camp-fire. You, who do not understand why I make such choice, are apt to ask: "Is it not a mirage you see—the charm of color, and form, and music that you say is in the Desert? We do not see these things. We only see uncouth fashioning, where you see magnificence or grace. The cry of a cougar—the coyote's wailing is uncanny to hear; yet you call it music. You

tell us there is color in the Desert; while we, who know, see nothing but the endless gray—gray always and always. We are wise with the wisdom of cities and many men, and therefore we know. It is but a mirage, this charm of the Desert."

The Beauty of the Desert.

And so you wise ones decide for the ones whom you call poor fools, and say that the mirage they follow is like unto the one the wanderer a-thirst sees, or the old miner in his quest for rainbow-gold.

Well, is happiness, or beauty, or any of the things that give us joy anything more than a mirage? Do they exist except as we see them? And is it not well that we are thus unwise to believe in the non-existent? For when we shall have come to the door of death, and all of life is ended, we shall come to know that through all the years that have been ours, the heart was made glad by our faiths more often than by facts. So let me believe in the Desert still. We find in the world only what we, ourselves, bring into it. If we find love, and joy, and beauty, it is because we are capable of loving, and can feel joy, and can see beauty. They are not there, except as they are of us.

So, now, go your way and leave me and the old miners to our faiths—our fancies, if you will. At least, we have had much that you have missed.

Perhaps it is because of all this that I feel kinship with those who believe in the wonder-tales.

After you have come to know these men and their stories, and have lived long enough in the land they have made their own to understand why it is they cannot go away, you will have a tender regard for them and their welfare, no matter where your lot may be cast in all the after years. You will never forget ever so small a part of any of the stories that they have told you.

The Beauty of the Desert.

The seasons will come and go, you will make new friends and bury the old, and life will bring you fresh interests and let slip the things that you knew on other by-ways; but of these old men and their complete trust, there shall never come to you a forgetting. To the last chapter of your life, the memory of their own—and their stories—will be with you, to link you yet closer to the old days when you found the Desert and its men.

THE LOST BLUE BUCKET MINES.

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

NO STATE in the Union contains so great a variety of minerals and geological phenomena as Nevada. Not a county of the State is so rich in them as is Humboldt. And one may add that perhaps no other like area on the face of the globe so abounds in legends of "lost mines"—of fascinating tales of fabulous "finds" of every valuable mineral or precious stone that Mother Earth has ever given birth to—as that same county lying in the northeastern corner of the State. Go out there among the old prospectors for a month or more, and you will hear scores upon scores of stories of the marvelous findings of diamonds and rubies, of emeralds and turquoise, of copper and lead, of silver and gold. But mostly of gold. For the dream of the old-time prospector is always of finding gold in quantity so great that one would grow bewildered in its computation.

Simple hearted and credulous, there are dozens of them today looking for mines that have never existed, save in the lurid imagination of some legend-maker—some emigrant who crossed the plains in the late 'forties or early 'fifties, and at the end of his journey told eager listeners of his "find" away back, somewhere, in the barren-land. How many trusting ones among the listeners found death in the Desert

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

through the lure of these legends, God only knows! But the unmarked graves that resulted are more than you would guess there could be—graves carelessly or wantonly dug by way of the wild tales told by men who (just to be the envied centre of a crowd of open-mouthed listeners) fabricated them for their own amusement. Such falsehoods led many a one away to bear the hardships and privations of years of Desert roving; perhaps to die at last in the lonely land, and to die there alone. Have you ever thought what it would be like, for a man to die in the Desert—perhaps a hundred miles from any other human being—alone under the staring sky, with no sight of moving things but the gray lizards and the little brown squirrels, and a lone coyote watching him from some rise a few yards away; with no sound but the coyote's wailing cry, and the moaning of the Desert wind. So many, many men have died in just this way; only we are apt to forget that it is ever so.

Over there in that half-explored, wholly interesting country, where the chief chain of mountains has been fashioned by the united work of the great lava flow and the erosion of the centuries into flattened tops, making a vast landscape of sky-touching tablelands—where the cliffs and chasms take on strange shapes and colorings—where the odd and unusual in mountain and plain is about you always and everywhere, there lies, still unfound by the prospectors, a cañon that these aged and earnest men will tell you is rich in nuggets of gold—the cañon of the "Blue Bucket" diggings.

In 1845 one of the earliest trains of emigrants crossing the plains, with Oregon for an objective point, was working its way down the banks of the Humboldt, and at Gravelly Ford—a noted point on the old road, where now is the station of Beowawe—separated into two

parties; one continuing on down the Humboldt river, while the other took the road by the way of Black Rock into California. The latter party on reaching the Pacific Coast had startling stories to tell of their adventures upon the way, while going through that country that lies back from that river which in the early days was known as "Mary's River," instead of "Humboldt."

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And this is what they told:

After leaving Black Rock—perhaps three or four days' travel beyond that grim, dark-hued promontory—they had passed through a cañon so deep and rough that "it seemed only a bird would be able to get out, once it found itself in a cañon." However, after successfully overcoming a deluge of difficulties that beset them, they finally made their way through. Yet, even so, in many places they had to take their wagons apart, and—piece by piece—hoist them up cliffs and down declivities by means of ropes. It was a fearful experience of trial and hardship, unusual even in Desert travel of the early times.

It was when directing their course toward the "Twin Sister" peaks of Oregon, though while yet in Nevada, that they had come upon this cañon, to them unknown and unnamed, even in any description given by other wayfarers who later came through the land. Neither had they any knowledge of it from other emigrants who had gone before. It seemed to be a side road, little used, and turning out from the one better known and more traveled. There, while the wagons were grinding their way over boulders and broken rock of all sorts and sizes, they found, in the shallow creek and in the ruts made by the wagon-wheels, what in their ignorance and inexperience they called "brass." They had heard of gold dust, of course; but this was not dust.

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

It must then be brass. But it was pretty, this "brass"; and it attracted the attention in particular of the women and children, who were mainly the ones to gather it. The men were too much interested in the matter of getting their party through this difficult pass to pay heed to pretty playthings found along the way.

The wagons, and the buckets hanging to their sides, were painted a vivid blue. And into the buckets were thrown the supposedly worthless nuggets. When crossing the Deschutes river the wagons were partially capsized, and many of the emigrants' belongings lost. Among such things as went to the bottom of the Deschutes were the buckets that carried the bright bits of metal. A very few pieces, however, had been cast into the wagons with other things, and were thus saved. These, with their other possessions, the emigrants carried into the country of their new homes—eastern Oregon, where many of them permanently remained. Some of them, though, later, went southward, and eventually —in 1848—found themselves at Sutter's Fort. They remained there during the first months of that year, and there they were shown gold dust and small nuggets. In them they recognized a metal that they had previously supposed to be "brass."

Doubtful if any of their old companions had kept the bits of yellow metal they had brought to the farther West with them, they nevertheless wrote, making inquiry. As soon as a letter could reach them, there came not only a reply, but bits of gold—nuggets from the place that was henceforth to be known as the "Blue Bucket district"—that had been preserved through the many past months by the children of the party who had kept them for playthings.

Comparison with the nuggets then being shown at Sutter Creek proved these playthings to be gold. Of

a coarse sort, but without doubt gold. A party of ninety was organized and equipped for the journey, and at once started back, in spite of the warnings of friends that Indians were up in arms against the whites, and that traveling had become even more perilous than before. Regardless of the almost certain encounters with Indians, they set out. Of the ninety who left, full of courage and hope, not half lived to reach home. Long before they came to the country of the "Blue Bucket" diggings, Indians fell upon them, and only by a miracle did any of their number escape. Of the few who did reach California and Oregon again, only two of them were of the original party that knew the exact locality of the cañon of the "Blue Bucket" gold. With Indians on the warpath they were too disheartened to continue the search after their companions had been massacred; so that—wounded and sick—they went back to the coast. They were too discouraged with the result of their one trip to ever make an attempt at a second journey into greasewood-land and the home of the jack-rabbit. The Indians were there; let them have it.

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

But to Dr. Dane, as they lay sick at Yreka, they showed the nuggets they still retained, and to him they told the story of the emigrants' "find." They described the locality of the cañon, and gave him minute directions as to where one should go to find it. These men died, and for some time interest in the "Blue Bucket" gold lapsed. But years later, while engaged in placer mining, the Doctor heard that which quickened his interest. He had a small store at the place on the river where he was working his placers; and there an occasional traveler might find accommodations for the night.

To this stopping place there came a Hudson Bay trap-

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

per one day, asking for a night's shelter. He had just crossed the plains, he said; and was full of stories of interesting experiences. The morning after his arrival, he accompanied the Doctor down to the placer claims to see the (to him) novel sight of gold washing. Plunging his hand into the Long Tom, the Doctor took out a handful of black sand and gold, and poured it into the joined palms which the trapper held out to him. It was unusually good that morning, containing a large number of good-sized nuggets. The trapper looked at them curiously.

"Is that stuff sure-enough gold?" he asked.

"Well," answered Doctor Dane, amused at his surprise and ignorance, "it seems to satisfy the people from whom we buy anything. They give us, in exchange, anything we want for it. Doesn't that prove to you what it is?"

"If that's gold," the trapper replied, "I know where there's any amount of it! It's in a place I could easily find again, too, for I kept my horses in that cañon all winter—a fine, watered cañon back near the emigrant road that comes out by the way of High Rock. I didn't find it—the gold—until I went to get my horses in the Spring. There's lots of these gold pebbles in the creek—lots of 'em! Why, I could load my two horses with all they could carry, inside of an hour of hunting them and picking them up!"

He then went on to give the Doctor a detailed description of the country about there, and in particular the appearance of the cañon, which was a very long one, he said. The account he gave tallied precisely with the description of that cañon where the emigrants had found the famed "brass."

It was arranged that the trapper should immediately take the Doctor to the place; Indian depredations hav-

ing become less frequent in occurrence. Doctor Dane, loth to make the long trip into an unknown country with an entire stranger, induced him to allow a third person to join their little party. From the first, the trapper had said he could easily retrace his way by means of his dead campfires to which they would come day after day. And as they went back into the Desert country, in no instance did he fail to show them where he had camped but a few days before. Nor in any way did he do aught to create suspicion that he was otherwise than perfectly honest in all his declarations.

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

Their route lay through a country that was strange to the Doctor, and it was not until he found himself at the head of Goose Lake Valley, through which he had passed on his way to the West, that he got his bearings. When they reached Wardner Hill, and while standing on its bare and level summit, from which point a magnificent view can be had of the whole surrounding country, the trapper said—pointing northward to where two peaks rose sixty or seventy miles away, and which are now known as "Steen" and "Pueblo" mountains—:

"There! That mountain to the right is the one; and the cañon is on this side. That is the place where I put my horses to graze. There is a creek in it that runs a big stream in the Spring; but in the Fall it goes 'most dry. The cañon is pretty level part of the way, and there's a fine lot of bunch grass all over it; but farther up, the walls are terrible high and it's so rough that it's about all a horse can do to get through it."

Two days' travel brought them there. And Doctor Dane found the place exactly as described. It fully answered the description given by the old emigrants, as well as that which the trapper had given before starting out. The three men were scarcely within the cañon

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

ere they came upon evidence of a recent cloudburst. The creek banks were piled high with uprooted shrubs, rose-bushes and the bush of the wild gooseberry, buck-brush and willows, left there by the flood. The banks themselves were cut out, and drift and brushwood had made dams across the channel. Fresh-cut gullies were everywhere. The track of the storm's devastation grew rougher as the men penetrated farther and farther into the cañon. At last, riding was an impossibility, and they dismounted to clamber over the boulders or to creep around the cliffs. Even the creek's course had been changed in places, and a new channel made. The work the cloudburst had done was not a month old.

To find the spot where he had seen the nuggets was easy for the trapper, but of nuggets themselves there were none to be found. If gold had ever been there, it was either hidden by the storm's debris, or had been swept farther down by the violence of the flood's resistless waters. They searched and searched, but in vain. Having come unprepared to mine for gold after the usual placer fashion, the quest was for the time abandoned.

Had Doctor Dane doubted for one instant (which he never did), the trapper's sincerity, that doubt would have been wholly dissipated by seeing the persistence with which the trapper prosecuted his search; by the perseverance, later, when a start for home must be made, with which he entreated the Doctor to stay yet longer. He declared over and over again that the gold was there—he knew it; and Doctor Dane, during the days of their search, became more and more convinced that it was so. Yet they had to return to civilization without even one small nugget to reward them

for their tedious and tiring trip, or their days of seeking for the "Blue Bucket" gold.

The Lost Blue Bucket Mines

With another year, however, the quest was renewed—but not by these men. And the men who sought for it then were not more eager and confident than are those who go there today. For they who believe in the story, fairy-tale or not, as it may be, are growing in number with the years, and every year sees new converts.

Some go there boldly—organized parties for prospecting, willing the public should know of the object of their trip—others, half-ashamed of their own credulity, slip away by themselves into that land of space and stillness, and wander its mountain ways alone, lest others may know, and jeer at their faith. Men went last year to find the "Blue Bucket" mines; other men are there now. The years wax and wane; but time does not lessen their faith. Always and always will there be those who go up and down the length of Desertland seeking the mines that are myths; serving the Sorceress of the sand wastes until the day shall come when they lie down to rest on the old Overland Trail, where the bones of those who broke the way were buried in the long ago.

A MEMORY OF THE DESERT.

A Memory of the Desert.

QUESTS there have been that promised fulfillment without stint and without fail, only to prove—just as one's outreached hand caught at the garments of Fortune—it was but a vision more tantalizing than any mirage. And one easily sees visions, in that land of visible and invisible mysteries.

Once, there was one that I knew—one who was counted too sane to see visions and too wise to be deceived—who went a-search for diamonds, there in the Desert. Topaz, and turquoise, and other things of beauty are there, but of diamonds none have been found.

To one of the wee towns that make scattered dots on the map of Nevada southward from the Black Rock country, there came an old prospector; and he singled out this man, from all whom he knew, to take into his confidence and make half-owner in the wonderful diamond mines he had found. He brought with him a sack of the gems, to prove the truth of his assertions—a canvas bag full of sparkling white things that under the gaslight, as they were spread out, were beautiful enough to be real. Such a sight! Long, long afterward I, too, saw them, and I did not wonder that ignorance of the diamond in its rough state, might very well help a man to believe in these—to think them the gems

A Memory of the Desert

they looked to be. There must have been fifty pounds of the pretty, worthless baubles that were poured into a bright and new tin pan, and filled it well to the brim. It seemed impossible that they had not been cut by a lapidary, so perfect were they on all sides. Not crystals as we know them, pointed on one end only; but polished, and true, with facets cut by Nature on every side. The most beautiful crystals I have ever seen, and of a sort that I had never come across here in the West.

Out beyond the Quin River Desert, the Old Prospector found them, believing them to be diamonds of worth. They were lying about in quantities, sprinkling the sand wastes off there at the Desert's edge, where the sands gather together in dunes, only to scatter themselves broadcast, as grain is tossed from the hand of the sower. So the winds cover and uncover them; and to them, one day, came these men believing in their worth; and many a dollar that might have gone better ways, went toward the gathering of what came, later, to shame them for their simple credulity.

Others (and I among them, also) found copper out there—melted copper that I took from its home in the mountain, where it had been melted by the great conflagration. It seemed easy to believe the Desert's treasure-trove might well be there. It is so easy to dream of things that never present themselves to one in lands where strange things do not intrude. But here it would seem that any marvelous thing might very well be; the country is so weird—so unusual—so unlike our everyday world. You find yourself looking for all sorts of impossible things to happen. You find yourself saying: "Why not?"

But my handfuls of copper were all there were—there was never a sign of a ledge. Just melted bits from a

A Memory of the Desert

"blow-out"—spewed out by the earth's internal fires, with its parent ledge leagues upon leagues away.

And a sulphur mine that I tried to conquer? Did it not become conqueror itself? It fought me with fire, though hidden, and so drove me away. Yet, I have heard that others have now gone there to do what I, in vain, tried to do. Will they succeed, or will they, too, be vanquished by the earth's better weapon? Or, will the Desert have gone back to its way of old, and become cool once more, as it was away back in the early 'sixties? I often ponder over it. It was a mystery then, it is a mystery still.

A DESERT MYSTERY.

A Desert Mystery

YOU may try as you will to comprehend, in its entirety, the awful tragedy of Pelee and La Soufriere—to grasp it as something of modern times and real—yet, as you read, you are aware it seems as remote from our day as the stories of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and more than half fiction. It was too appalling a tragedy—too stupendous a death-roll, for the comprehension of any but those who afterward stood in the silence where once there was sound, and saw the fearful dead that bestrewed the places where once the living walked. Under the shadow of its black phophesy the people worked or played, loved and married, bore children and buried them—living out the measure of their days unheedful of the thing that was, some day, to come. None who live within a volcano's possible reach but know its danger; yet who will ever believe that he himself is to be in the pathway of its wrath?

And how thin the old Earth's crust is, over her mighty fires! And the warnings that she sends before her outbreaks—how little are they heeded! Man only believes in danger when that danger has come.

With my thoughts dwelling upon the Earth's vagaries; of the uncertainty of her temper where her fires burn the fiercest, I am reminded of a certain place

A Desert Mystery

where, once, I found a subterranean temperature that was tremendous.

It was a strange thing that I came upon, that time. Let me tell you of it.

It was in January, 1900, that I formed a partnership with a former associate in gold mining, to prospect for sulphur deposits in Northern Nevada. There are vast beds of pure sulphur (the largest in the United States, unless those of Louisiana that lie under the sea are included) lying west of north of the Central Pacific Railroad, and forty miles away from its threads of steel. They are the great Humboldt sulphur mines, so well known. Following that trend all the way to the Oregon line are scattered indications of sulphur throughout that weird and barren land that the great lava flow of the North has spread itself over.

For our initial work, we selected a district a short distance westward from the railroad station of Humboldt. As early as the late '60's I had had knowledge of small prospect hole at that especial place; and, as it was within a hundred and fifty yards of the railroad track (thus solving the problem of cheap transportation, which, in that land of long distances is the most serious drawback to the development of mines carrying small "values") we determined to begin our operations there.

Just prior to the laying of the Central Pacific's rails through the great gray valley of the Humboldt—the one-time-called "River of Death"—these beds were located by James Spence; and from the single prospect hole (an incline of not more than thirty feet in depth) he took some fifteen or twenty tons of sulphur. Two "mountain schooners" (Nevada's desert camel of the early days), driven by himself and Henry Childers, had carried the crude ore into Virginia City, where it

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

A Desert Mystery

became the property of Hy Barnes, and—an unprofitable speculation. I name these people to you because they were real people, even as the stories are real. In cabins and by camp-fires I have heard old miners tell these things so often that the names of these men are as familiar to me as my own. Hy Barnes could not dispose of it, and the months that came saw it lying there—a flaming yellow pyramid on the side of Mount Davidson. This was in Virginia City's palmy days. Later—for that must have been in '64 or '65—when the Central Pacific Railroad Company was building its snowsheds over the Sierra Nevada mountains, and bolt-holes were being drilled into the rock walls, to which the sheds cling like swallows' nests against a cliff, sulphur was needed for securing the bolts in place. Into these holes smoking-hot sulphur was poured as the iron rods were driven home, to hold them firmly; it having that unusual quality of non-shrinkage in cooling, peculiar to itself. The sulphur used in the work—two tons—was taken from the surface of the ground on the old Spence claim. No other work had ever been done there. So much was history. It was generally thought, by those interested in mining, that it had been simply a "blow-out" from some untraceable deposit, and that it was not worth the prospecting.

Although I knew of it earlier, I was too young to take any special note of it until about the year 1873. At that time it attracted my attention by reason of the very great number of freshly-shed snake-skins that lay about in the crevices of the gypsum and lava, the sulphur and ash. Dozens of them! Hundreds of them! And, paying heed to the fact, I observed thereafter that each spring they were replaced by others, while the old ones were blown away by the whirlwinds. Evidently it was a famous place for reptiles; yet it

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was a puzzle to me, always, that in such a quarry of snake-skins, I should never chance to see the snakes themselves.

Back in those years when I first knew sagebrush-land as home, I was an omniverous—if not always a discriminating—reader; and, on summer days when the desert sun shone hot and a particularly fascinating book fell into my hands, I at once sought some spot that offered both cool shade and quiet. What better place than just within the deserted incline of the old sulphur mine? There, surrounded by the white and yellow of gypsum and sulphur walls festooned with the silvery-white skins, I had a retreat all my own, and quite as full of charm to me as any rose-hung bower could have been to another girl—a girl not of the gray wastes and solitudes of the Desert. There, with eyes and heart deep buried in my books, I spent many and many a delightful hour, retreating farther and farther down the incline, as the afternoon sun found and followed me in there. For—burn as it might outside—it was always a delightfully cool place within the incline. There were times when, with an old broken shovel I found there, I dug into the bottom of the deserted prospect-hole for specimens of sulphur crystals—those delicate clusters of glittering yellow jewels that belong to fairyland—yet, dig deep as I would into the soft ash and gypsum, I never observed the slightest indication of heat. I know that in those days there was no indication of subterranean heat whatever.

Then—by and by—I left the Desert for a home at tide-water; and straightway forgot all about he sulphur beds, until years afterward, when I was reminded of them by hearing of a skeleton that had been found there.

In 1888 or '89, Samuel H. Kitto and Dan Merrigan,

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two young men out for a jaunt one spring morning, came unexpectedly upon the bleached bones of an unknown man lying at the foot of a hollow cone that is commonly known as "the Crater," half a mile from the old prospect-hole. Nothing was found whereby the dead man might have been identified. There was no paper, no article of clothing—absolutely nothing except an open and rusty razor lying by his side. Of course the Coroner came, as the law provided; and there was the usual farce of an inquest on a fragment of what had once been human. Then the sun-and-storm-whitened bones were carried to the railroad station and buried in the little graveyard where the dead are mostly nameless—tramps killed by some passing train, or (as this one) a fleshless skeleton found far away from wagon road or railroad track. Their stories are unknown and their graves unmarked.

It was at "the Crater"—after doing some preliminary location work at the point where Spence had once worked the claim—that we decided to sink our first shaft. This cone is one of a number of such vent-holes that can be traced thereabouts—vent-holes for furnaces that were burned out centuries ago. Fires have burned and died; great mountain ranges have been lifted high on either side of the valley, down in which the vents are now all but covered by the valley's soil. Only this one lifts itself distinctive—rising sharply a few feet from the level of the plain, to be seen several miles away. The valley here is quite flat—broad, long, and a dead level. There are great alkali flats, absolutely bare and miles wide; but where the sulphur beds are, greasewood—short, scrubby and dead-looking—grows sparsely. Now and then the ground is sprinkled with gravel and flakes of quartz washed down from the mountains.

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All the way from the railroad track (which here runs northeast and southwest) to the river, two or three miles away, one may find indications of sulphur. And when one comes to the river itself, one finds other cones, quite unlike these, are fantastically topped with a lime-crust that has resisted the erosion which has eaten the lower strata away. The same hard crust overlies the whole valley here for miles and miles, barely hidden under a thin veneer of soil. But down by the cones by the river's edge (the river of today, whose course is through the centre of the mile-wide channel of the great river of the dead years), one may easily trace the strata downward far below the crust's line. First, the mushroom-shaped lime topping, whose jagged edges in many places have taken unto themselves the semblance of grotesque, unkenned creatures—dragons and gargoyles, and strange open-jawed monsters that seem born of some nightmare. Next, a broad band of almost pure salt—two to three feet in depth; then gypsum and volcanic ash plentifully streaked with sulphur, down to the level of the ancient river bed. They are queer things, these cones that have been fashioned by creeks cut by short-lived floods born from the cloud-bursts on the high lands; and yearly erosion is eating them more surely away.

But none of these, in spite of the evidence of sulphur, are kindred with "the Crater." There, where we made our locations (which through their brimstone suggestiveness seemed to name themselves Aetna, Vesuvius, Popocatapetl, Yztaccihuatl, Mauna Loa and Kilauea), is lava and pumice in plenty; and in walking over the ground—especially if it be on a little rise—one hears the echo of his footsteps as though the sound were sent back from a great vault beneath—a hollow echo that tells of vast caverns underground.

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I know too little of scientific lore to dare say what the conditions we found there may indicate; I can only tell what we discovered during our weeks of prospecting, and will leave to others the task of translating the signs that puzzle us still.

We began sinking the shaft in "the Crater" on the twenty-ninth of January. The only men working on the claims at that time were my partner and one of his sons. Later, the younger man's place was taken by an Indian—a young Paiute.

Though it is no part of this story, yet just here let me tell what we found during the morning of that first day's work. There, in "the Crater," but two or three feet down, we came on the skeleton of a man that had been thrust (not buried in decent wise—but jammed) into the hollow hole which the wind-drifts of each year had covered still deeper with the powdered pumice and gypsum and ash tossed down from the brim of the wee "crater."

The side of the skull was crushed in, and the body bent nearly double, as though hurriedly crowded into a hole too small for honest burial. The story? Who knows? Did that other—the one found years before but a few yards from this spot—did he——? But who can say? It is but another mystery of that great, gray land of mysteries.

The skeleton fell apart when unearthed and lay on the crater's edge, where it was cast up by the shovels, a heap of fragile brown bones that seemed more like strips and bits of wet pasteboard than anything else. The water-soaked ash (there had been an unusually warm period for January, and the snow of the valleys was melted, completely saturating the ground) and the moistened sulphur-stained formation we found there had communicated to the bones a peculiar flexi-

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bility; for they bent between our fingers like whalebone. It was an uncanny thing to find at the very outset of our work; so we quickly buried them again, giving them sepulture in the "Popocatapetl's" location monument at the crater's rim. All but the skull and thigh bones—they were set aside to find place with many another strange thing that came out of the Desert in my strangely-lived Desert life.

We were still under the spell that the grewsome "find" had cast over us, when the shaft developed something even more mysterious—an unsolved mystery to this day, at least to the four persons who, so far as I know, are the only ones who have known of it.

After the last slabs of lava-rock had been replaced upon the monument, I dropped over the rim into the pit, and clambered down to the shaft. "The Crater" (such a baby crater it is!) was filled well to the top with a fine gray volcanic ash—dry on top, a bit moist from the rains beneath; while scattered through it were quantities of the rough, unfriendly rock that made the crust of the cone. In the centre of this was the hole that was yet too small to be dignified by the name of a shaft.

From the bottom of the excavation my partner scooped up a handful of the moist earth and asked me to hold out my hands. I did so, and he poured it in. It was warm!—perceptibly so. I was astounded—too puzzled to say anything; and I stood there holding it, looking stupidly at him for an explanation. He laughed; and then, throwing out a shovelful or two from the shaft, took from underneath some that was freshly uncovered.

"Here, take this!"

I don't remember what I said, but I cried out in as-

tonishment as I let it fall. It was hot!—not just warm, but hot!

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That was the beginning of what, for weeks and weeks, was to us a daily wonder. Seven or eight feet beneath the surface of the ground we would find this unexplainable heat. Not alone at that particular place, but over a five-mile area, we found like conditions. On the slope just below the old prospect hole we came on ground that was covered here and there with the so-called "petrified grass"—salt grass and the three-cornered stems of Paiute grass, over which, at some former time, lime-impregnated waters from hot springs had flowed. I tried to answer all the questions that came crowding in upon me, by saying to myself that, at some time in the remote past, there had been boiling springs here—springs that were now sealed up. But when I remembered that a quarter of a century before, the earth in the bottom of Spence's old incline was cold, I felt that such explanations were inadequate. Nowhere, in all our knowledge of the valley, had there ever been steam, or fire, or heat. I went into the camps of my Paiute friends and questioned the elders. None of them, nor their fathers, nor their fathers' fathers before them, had ever heard of a time when the valley had spit steam or fire; and their legends (told by father to son as they sit by the campfire, and memorized with infinite accuracy) date back to a time earlier than the white man's history.

Shaft after shaft was sunk, and sulphur in plenty was found. Some of it was crystalized; and much of it was colored like a California poppy. Elsewhere we found a snow-white marvel of sulphur—sulphur that turned yellow only when a lighted match was touched to it, and was ninety-five per cent pure! Now and then we came upon "black" sulphur—that glassy,

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dark-green sort made by nature in those molds where pressure is greatest. Where lime rock was, we found pisolite and oölite in small quantities. That meant there had been, at some time, boiling springs. But such places were few. In the deeper shafts, volcanic ash was found in undisturbed strata. Volcanic rock and lava were everywhere; and the lava was frequently streaked with cinnabar. Sometimes a waxy formation would be encountered that discouraged work at that point. It would not break, as rock ordinarily will, from shots of giant powder; but was of a texture that refused to be shattered when blasted, and was too hard to be worked with picks. And everywhere was that mysterious heat.

When we were some fifteen feet down the deepest shaft we sunk, I wrote to the California Academy of Sciences describing the conditions there (but not naming the locality) and asked if a similar state of affairs was known to exist anywhere else in the world. They were unable to give me any information on the subject, but referred the letter to Prof. Branner, of Stanford University. In reply to my brief outline of conditions he wrote as follows:

"I regret to say that I do not know of any such place as you mention in your letter. The temperature of the crust of the earth varies so much, however, in different places that no fixed law has ever been found for the downward increase of the temperature, except of local application. In the Comstock mining region, the temperature is one degree for every twenty-eight feet, down to 3,000 feet; in the north of England, it is one degree for forty-nine feet; in New South Wales, it is one degree for eighty feet; in Leipsic, it is one degree for fifty-six feet; at Grass Valley, Cal., it is one degree for one hundred and seven feet; in the cop-

per mines of Michigan, it is one degree for two hundred and twenty-four feet, and so on."

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Up and down, back and forth, we prospected, sinking shafts where we could—tasting it, smelling it, testing it with a match. The whole district, so far as we investigated, is richly underlaid with sulphur; but everywhere that we sunk on the claims we found that strange heat—a heat too great to permit our continuing the work. Where the lava was encountered in greatest quantities, we uncovered the home of the snakes, for it was as full of bubble holes as a honey-comb is of cells. There, long, slim (and entirely harmless) snakes were housed in numbers that were appalling. When the explosions disturbed them from their winter's rest, they had crawled to the walls of the shafts, through the network of cracks that underlie the district, and, tumbling down to the bottom, coiled, and lifted, and writhed there, vainly trying to get out, and quite unpleasing things to see.

The weather turned cold—eight degrees below zero. But the temperature underground was growing hotter and hotter, the deeper the shaft was sunk. At eighteen feet each man who worked there suffered from frightful headaches, and the younger man had to return to his home in Sacramento. Their clothing—even their buckskin gloves—rotted as they worked, and their skin burned and stung. The drill's point in a few moments would become so hot that it caused discomfort to touch it with the bare hand. After a series of blasts had been put off, and the smoke had escaped from the shaft, a cloud of vapor would arise while the mercury marked zero at the top; and the rock thrown up from the bottom was so hot that it could not be handled at all bare-handed.

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Each night the giant powder froze. Each morning it was thawed in a few minutes by throwing it over a wheelbarrow load of rock and ash from the bottom of the shaft. Sometimes all the sticks of powder in the box would be frozen together, and the mass frozen to the box itself; but by the time the drill-hole was ready for it, the powder would be found thawed. Canteens of water, carried by the men coming to work, were frozen solid. Buried in the broken bits of rock a few moments, the ice would immediately melt. By and by—as the work progressed further downward—the drills became so hot that their temper was destroyed (and, incidentally, our own) and the men could make but little headway in their work. Still they kept on—changing shift every few minutes, and being hauled to the top with faces burning red, down which rivulets of sweat ran.

Some of the time it was, as has been said, zero weather; but on the warmest day the mercury marked fifty degrees. The shaft was down twenty-three feet. The mercury marked 120° when taken to the bottom of the shaft as soon as a man could descend after the shots had been fired. At twenty-nine feet it registered one hundred and forty degrees. The men—working five-minute shifts—sank a foot deeper; but the experience of the last one down was such that not one of them would again venture into that furnace of frightful heat, and the temperature after that last shot was not taken. They were satisfied with the knowledge already obtained—that the heat had increased something like ninety degrees in twenty-nine feet, at the point where the old Spence shaft was—where, more than five-and-twenty years ago, it was a cool and pleasant place to sit and read in on summer afternoons!

Are there fires underneath? Or sealed-up boiling

springs? Or gases that create heat? Or what? We had all sorts of theories, of course; and we talked together of the statements that had been made to us that there were places in the valley where the ground had settled unaccountably during the previous ten years; and we did a great deal of wondering. But all our speculations left us baffled and bewildered. And because we could not satisfy ourselves as to the causes, we said nothing of the affair to anyone else. The few folk who live within sight of the ground, and the hundreds that pass over it in railway cars every day, have never heard nor known of these things that would seem to me now (living here in rose-land by the sea, and "where things never happen") but a dream, did I not have, as proof of it really having happened, over the door of my den—where I can look up and see it as I write—the skull and crossbones of the man of "Popocatapetl."

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People came there to visit the "prospects," but not till after the deepest shafts had been partially refilled, that stray horses and cattle might not fall in them, to be killed or crippled. Some of the smaller shafts there were, in which (had they but closely noticed) some heat might have been observed. But much of the heat disappeared after the shafts had been exposed to the air for a while. So the visitors went away, discovering nothing unusual, at least up to the time when I abandoned the claims as impracticable for working.

Sulphur there is a-plenty, but it is guarded by an inferno of subterranean heat that puts it far beyond the reach of the miner's pick and drill. Will the heat that so strangely came, after a while subside? Who can say what may happen? I only know it is a place of serpents and sulphurous smells, of strange heat, of dead men's bones, and mystery. Such places are best let alone. I—for one—want no more of them.

THE TOLL OF THE DESERT.

The Toll of the Desert.

MIRAGE of Water, or Mirage of a Mine! It matters not which it may be, the end is the same for him who follows after the Siren who is always in league with Death. All the years of his life the Old Prospector gives to the Desert his best and his all—gives hope, and joy, and love, even as he gave youth. He gives his very soul; then, finally, he commits his body to the Desert's keeping—to sleep there in its everlasting silence. It is the final toll that the Desert takes of a man. Cruel? Nay, the Desert is kind; for in death the body rests where the heart found its joy in life. What lover could ask more?

The sands, that knew his every footfall, cradle him. The everlasting mountains—the heights he loved—stand watch and ward. And the night-wind, that was with him when he lay out under the stars, shall sing his slumber-song now, as some Indian mother croons over the babe that, in the twilight, falls asleep at her breast. In such wise, does the Old Prospector find rest in the Desert.

In such wise, would all lovers of that land meet the end. To go to sleep there under the white stars; to go away into the land of dreams, lying in the arms of the Desert; to rest—and rest— and rest, through all time, through centuries of silence and solitude! What would you that one (loving the land) should have,

when the Night comes, that could be more desired? They who have lived long there ask for no other burial, be assured.

The Toll of the Desert

And of this, too, you may be sure. If you have gone into the Desert and found its Soul, you have climbed more than half-way up the ladder that reaches Godward. Therefore, I say, these men who live there are not men without religion; though creeds they may not (and probably do not) claim as theirs. But it is not a far thing from reverence, as one knows it in a temple, to stand with voice hushed and ear inclined, while God and the Desert speak together. Not once a week—on the Sabbath—is this so. But it is part of what comes to one (though unconsciously, mayhap) daily. They know it, but give it no name.

So you will understand that he who has lived there—if he has lived a life that has harmed no man—dies unafraid. To spend many years of one's life there, in the gray land, takes away the coward fear of Death. That is because one has learned to measure all things in the balance of just proportion; and then one comes to see how small is the atom, Self. More! This truth is taught in Nature's wisdom—that all things are best. He has led the life he believed was best; and he believes it is best that so he should die.

"Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes." If you come upon some Desert grave one day as you ride along any of the roads of old days, and if the words of the burial service come to you as you draw rein there, do not hesitate to add: "In sure and certain hope of the Resurrection." For none died without religion—as all great silence and space teaches religion—and few died without hope.

And this shall you remember. Though the Desert in its time takes full toll of the men who go there; yet never do they give unwillingly.

GRAVES OF THE DESERT.

Graves of the Desert.

GRAVES of the Desert! Forgotten graves. How many there are! In lonely places by the wayside, where civilized man has not yet succeeded in making "two blades of grass to grow" where once there was but the wide sweep of shifting, drifting sands; where still are found Desert stretches, alternating with the green oases which follow in the white man's wake across the plains, there are the graves of men fifty years dead—graves that bear silent testimony to the march of those battalions of America's heroes who were first to tempt the unknown in a land that once seemed God-despised.

Forgotten graves—dug in the sand and alkali that lightly covers the great inland Western states, whose priceless foundations—sunken far into the bowels of the earth, thousands of feet below the drab, sad-colored soil—were laid by the gnomes in those aeons when the world was being created in marvelous ways.

And the gnomes quarried huge masses of solid silver, and hewed and cut them cunningly, fashioning them into great polished cubes. These they laid for the far Western states to rest upon. And the blocks were cemented together with mortar made of molten, shining gold. Then over it all they spread the sand

and the soil and hid their handiwork, leaving it for man to uncover in the ages to come, when on these foundations he should upbuild the States.

Graves of the Desert.

Up and down the valleys, never resting, the whirlwinds go—those dancing dervishes of the Desert. They blow the sands hither and thither, back and forth unceasingly, as they spin giddily around year after year in their mad dance. Sometimes it seems as if they have almost brushed aside the sands and bared the foundations of these Silver States—these States of Gold. But a stronger whirlwind comes hurrying up the valley and buries the treasure deep again.

The little winds, as they go spinning on tiptoe round and round and round, until you are dizzy with the watching, whirl fast and mad; but, whirl as they will, whirl they never so madly, they are not strong enough to blow the sands away. And the people go back there to the

"tending of cattle and tossing of clover;
the grazing of cattle and growing of grain,"

in those places where Nature helps them make another oasis; and they will tell you that they are waiting for a wind that is in leash now; a great wind that will come out of the East.

Long they have watched and waited, and the sands are not yet blown away. Still they hope, as we all hope for the thing our heart leans to; and they will tell you that surely, some day, the East wind will come, sent by a power that will say, as it speeds it on its more than a thousand miles of journeying over mountain, and upland, and plain: "Go, blow the sands aside! brush them away, that the States may be built up from the foundations which the gnomes laid!"

These are the things they will tell you. Are they

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right, or are they wrong? Are they prophets, or only men who pray? Do they see into the future, or are they but dreamers? Who knows?

But, all the while the whirlwinds are tossing the sands about, and uncovering and covering over again the dead men's bones—men who made a way across States that, unknown to them, were built upon foundations of precious metals. And those who faltered and fell by the way in their quest for gold as they struggled to push on to California—California by the sea—little dreamed of the wealth beneath their feet.

They strung themselves out—a living thread—across the plains, over half a hundred years ago; today the engine's whistle shrieks from shore to shore. Progress provides us the luxuries of the modern mode of travel, and in journeying westward from States far beyond the Rocky Mountains' jagged ridge, here and there, after entering that vast tract which belongs to the great West, looking from the windows of the Pullman sleeper one may see faint traces of an old wagon road running parallel with the railway's double line of steel. It is not the road which is nearest the track—that is the newer road made by a newer people—but the old one traced there by the emigrants of fifty years ago, in their half a twelvemonths' journey across the Great American Desert. At first one does not see it; the track is not visible in the grass-covered Nebraska soil, when the train, after crossing the great river at Omaha, puts behind it all things having a likeness to the East.

Looking from the window as one rushes by, he sees bits of a rolling plain, where—here and there—tall and scattered trees having the semblance of gray ghosts in the late afternoon light, go hurrying across the landscape, their slender branches outlined against

a gold and glowing horizon, where red and fiery piled-up clouds fill full the western sky. Long stretches of shallow water, left by late rains, glisten amidst the growth of tall grasses, and in the reedy places—shaded by bush and tree—are grouped great flocks of ducks that in the fading daylight seem of a velvety blackness—scenes to thrill the heart of a hunter and charm the eye of an artist. Then the dusk's gray mantle drops slowly down and spreads over the sleeping world. Night has come—night on the plain—ere one has noted its approach, the while the train is rushing on into the darkness and the Western land.

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On and on till the dawning of day; on and on throughout the long, hot, dusty daylight hours; each revolution of the wheels of the mighty creature whose sinews are of steel, and whose blood is of fire, has plunged one farther and farther into that vast land which was once but the land of sand and sage, and of silence. Human progress has plowed and planted here and there, civilization has made grain to grow in many of the waste places, and has garnered where once was but the illimitable Desert.

Cities have sprung up out of the once silent plains, and a hundred thousand homes of the living now line the great pathway which was marked out by the skeletons of the dead.

Half a century ago it was the land of the dried-up alkali lakes; of the far-reaching sage; of the biting, white dust; of the ever-beckoning mirage; of the strangely slender, cloud-touching whirlwinds which come writhing and winding and twisting their way up the valley to meet you, and greet you with a whisper of unknown things, and then pass on, twisting and swaying and whirling, to mingle with the mystery of the Desert.

Graves of the Desert.

Into this land, more than fifty years ago, an army of heroes voyaged. Across the dried-up sea, whitened by salt and alkali, their Desert-ships drifted on and into the farther West. The courage that was theirs to dare the dangers they met upon the way, the hardships they encountered and endured, have passed into the great volumes of unwritten history.

We know of the many who reached Pacific shores, but who can count those who died like that other weary traveler of whom a loving brother wrote: "He lay down by the wayside; and using his burden for a pillow, fell into that dreamless sleep that kisses down his eyelids still." Time is levelling the cairns which mark their resting places, and those mile-stones of their great and awful journey are being scattered and destroyed.

Along the road marked out by their slow-moving ox-teams, which stretched its weary way from the Missouri river to the Sacramento, the graves of those who fell by the roadside marked its course. Even unto this day the old road is traceable, although but little used. Not everywhere may it be seen from the car windows; for in some places the railroad leaves it miles and miles away to the right or left. Yet, through that vast plain lying between the Rockies and the Sierras, one sometimes sees it close beside the track for a long distance; then, to avoid a grade, it winds around a rise in the plain and disappears.

The railroad has cut a tunnel through the rise, and where the ground is levelled it has laid its track of pine and steel; but in those long past days no shovel was struck into the earth, save to hollow out the shallow graves wherein were laid away the bones of those who are asleep in the Sahara of America.

Wherever these graves are found—if it be in a lo-

cality where there are rocks about—one will see that they are heaped with stones. After the soil had been scraped into a long, low mound—the one form into which earth is shaped to wear the sign of pathos—stones were closely piled upon it to keep the dear dead from the ghouls of the Desert; for coyote and badger alike disinterred them unless they were protected in this way.

Graves of the Desert.

So, if you will do as I have done, and—in the saddle—ride over mile after mile of the old emigrant road where it winds in and out among the gullies along the foothills, or where it dips further down into the lowlands, or as it trails along the mesa, or stretches out straight across the hard, alkali flats; or where it follows the banks of the muddy Humboldt, crossing and recrossing the bends where the old fords are, you will surely chance upon some long-neglected mounds which tell their silent stories of the sufferings and privations of those whose names must forever remain unknown. Sometimes a roughly-lettered board was placed at the head, but oftener it was "a grave without tombstone or token." The new years of this century find very nearly all of the boards fallen or lost. Even the piled-up stones are being scattered. The graves are suffering the neglect which comes to all forgotten things; perhaps many of these dead men were themselves forgotten two-score years ago.

"None come who knew them. There are none to say
Where lived they, whom loved they, ere they passed
away.
They sleep with none to marvel o'er them, save
Some stranger musing by the sunken grave."

Riding along the road one day, where it winds its way down the valley of the Humboldt, I came upon two half-hidden graves. They were just above the

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river bank, near an old-time emigrant ford. The headboards had rotted and fallen; the sagebrush—tall and thick—hid them from the passer-by. The brief inscription told but little:

John Knudson,
died Sept. 13th, 1854,
aged 43 years.
From La. Co., Wis.

The words had been cut in a small board, evidently part of some box taken from their scanty store, and then nailed across the top of another narrow piece. It had, no doubt, once been set firmly in the ground. A bit of board had also been at the foot; but, like the other, it, too, had broken off and fallen. The other grave bore these words—cut clearly, and with great care—on the little headboard:

John Walling,
Died
by drowning
September 1st, 1859.
Aged 28 years.

The lettering in the storm-stained, weather-checked wood had been cut so beautifully true and even that one is certain that it was the work of someone to whom the dead man was dear; for only loving hands could have been so painstaking. The graves were sunken; the stones were scattered. I went away; and when I came again it was to bring some one to re-set the boards at head and foot, and with a shovel heap the earth into the shape it bore when other hands than strangers' had done the same office for the dead forty years before.

Who were they? Were any of their kindred with them when, with their journey but half done, they stepped aside from the trail made by the path-finders

of the West, to stay in the barren valley, while the others went on to the land of promise by the Golden Gate? Or did they leave wives and children far behind them in the safer East, while they braved the perils of the plains to reach the land of gold for the sake of the wealth they would find, and all the great and good things it would bring to the dear ones at home? Or did mothers and children mourn, and wonder at the silence; and so die with their questioning ever unanswered? Who is there that dare say what that silence meant to them?

Graves of the Desert.

These are but two among the many hundreds barred along the route of the old emigrant road; and how pitifully alike would be the histories of their trials by the way, could we but know them all!

Almost all of these graves are nameless; yet in this valley there is at least one that bears a name, and is a grave well known. It bears the name of "Lucinda Duncan" upon a large, white cross, erected by the railway company when its roadbed was being made ready for the rails more than thirty years ago. It is "The Maiden's Grave," near Beowawe; and they placed the cross above the young girl sleeping in the valley, ere they passed on.

But the names of the dead lying in the numberless graves are, for the greater part, unknown; and age and sex can only be vaguely guessed at.

Here is one who was, perhaps, the captain of his caravan; a beloved leader of the men who manned some Desert-ship. How disheartened the survivors were when they had lain him away and had to push on under the burning, blistering skies without the companionship, the leadership, or the cheering encouragement of their trusted guide! Their ship was without a captain or pilot in this sea of gray, shoreless sand.

Graves of the Desert.

Could they carry it safely into port? they asked. And we, half a hundred years later, wonder—did they?

Here is a smaller, shorter grave, that holds, perhaps, the remains of some youth, hopeful and enthusiastic in his first venture into a new life; impatient at the slow pace of the weary oxen, dragging the wagons so few—so very few—miles each day toward the golden West he was so eager to reach.

Or perhaps it might have been a woman; one of those brave souls who, cleaving to the men of her household, left behind her all the dear associations of a lifetime to enter upon a new experience, and, hand in hand with father or hunband or son, went out into the unknown new country to share the work, the sickness or the dangers of the uncertain venture. No fear of the savages, who crept down upon many a one and left the victim murdered and mutilated by the road; no fear of disease that might claim them before the journey's end; no fear of any of the perils which made more than one man turn back before the journey had well begun, could keep these women from joining their dear kindred in the six months' march that reached almost from sea to sea. O men, men! how little you know the place you hold in the hearts of the women who love you!

There were many such grand and loyal women who went out beyond the pale of civilization, whose presence helped their men-folk onward, whose bravery spurred them forward to reach their golden goal, when heart-sick and weary they would have given up the struggle in despair.

These men were brave; yet there were times when courage failed them. As their hopes of reaching the sea faded in the face of unforeseen dangers met on the way, and they came to feel that, after all, the earth

Graves of the Desert.

was only a place in which to dig graves, these women lifted them up with hopeful words and helpful deeds and carried them through to the end.

Here is a tiny mound of stones; "a little grave, a little, little grave, an obscure grave." What this one holds, we know. But no one can ever guess the anguish of that mother who laid her baby here, nor how she suffered as she looked backward, ever backward, as the ox-teams carried her away. Before that day, she had complained because the oxen went so slowly; but afterward their pace was never slow enough. Every step was making the tiny mound grow fainter to her sight, as the journey was resumed, when the wee little one had been lain away. How she looked, and looked, back to the place where they had halted a day! And as she looked, she kept whispering to herself: "To-morrow I shall not be able to see it at all." Backward, all the while backward, did she turn her face to the spot where "baby" was;—the little child that was yet too young to have another name. The mother forgot then that she had ever looked forward. Oh, how fast the oxen went! If they would but go slower, so that she could see the little, low mound in the Desert a while longer! It seemed to her that all those great stones they had piled there, had been heaped upon her heart—her poor, bruised heart—because of the load there that was so, so heavy. All her life long her heart would ache, her whole body would throb with pain—wrists and palms and finger-tips—with the intensity of her longing to know once again the sound of its voice, the sight of its face, the touch of its satiny, rose-leaf hands. Oh, to know again the thrilling touch of soft, warm, baby fingers laid upon her check—the touch of moist baby lips laid against her breast!

Graves of the Desert.

Never again! She was going alone out of the Desert—out of the Valley of Death; going, and away back there by the roadside she had left a little grave.

Graves—graves—graves; how many there are! They are scattered all along the roadside from the far-away East to the farthest West; and yet not all who died on the old emigrant road received burial. The bodies of many, pierced by Indian arrows, never found sepulture, but, scalped and mutilated, were left by savage hands to the birds and coyotes, their bones bleaching there in the sun year after year.

Forgotten and neglected graves of the Desert! For more than fifty years they have been a part of that vast silence; visited only by the snows of winter or the rays of the burning summer sun. No one comes to mourn them. None come to lay flowers above their dead.

The afternoon sun goes down, shooting arrows of fire into the heavens, above a banner of crimson and gold. A curtain of blood-red grandeur fringed with flame is flung athwart the west in the magnificence of a Desert sunset—the like of which is not seen elsewhere in all the world—and as the sun sinks lower and lower behind the purple mountains, heaven above and earth beneath are all aglow with color. The sun's rays touch the highest peak of the range that guards the eastern side of the valley, and the snow-covered crest thousands of feet above is crowned by the dying sun with a diadem of more than regal splendor.

Slowly the wonderful light spreads over the landscape, changing the foot-hills to ruby, and the valley to rose, with an indescribable wealth of shading, and seeming to make every bush and briar burst into blossom with flowers of exquisite beauty. It falls with equal glory on green tree and gray shrub; on the

clover-sweet oasis of a later growth and the Desert that the earth knew of old. And down near the river where the emigrant road runs, where are the graves of emigrants of the early days, where the graves of Walling and Knudson were made, the lovely light creeps in waves of pink and violet, and lines that are faintly blue; and ere the night comes, Nature, who never forgets her children, even in the Desert's solitude, though man forget brother man, has covered them over as with a pall of beautiful blossoms.

Graves of the Desert.

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And here ends "In Miners' Mirage-Land," as written by Idah Meacham Strobridge, with cover design and chapter decorations made by J. Duncan Gleason, and published by the Artemisia Bindery, which is in Los Angeles, California, at the Sign of the Sagebrush; and completed on the Nineteenth day of August, One thousand nine hundred and four.

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